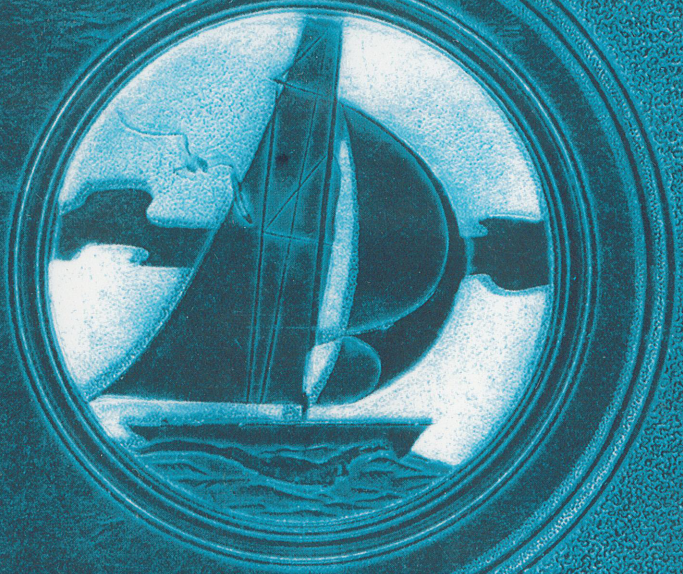
W. S. Van Dyke's Journal



White Shadows in the South Seas (1927-1928)

And Other Van Dyke on Van Dyke

Edited and Annotated by Rudy Behlmer

Some of the most outstanding films produced by M-G-M during the late 1920s and 1930s were directed by the colorful W.S. ("Woody") Van Dyke: **The Thin Man** (and its first three sequels), **Trader Horn, San Francisco, Rose-Marie, Tarzan, the Ape Man, Marie Antoinette,** and **White Shadows in the South Seas,** among many others.

On **White Shadows** Van Dyke spent four months in 1927-1928 filming in Tahiti, first in collaboration with the noted documentarian Robert Flaherty and then as the sole director. During this period he kept a journal, which he dispatched on the monthly mail boat to the U.S. The journal has never been published and possibly never seen by anyone except its writer and the recipient in Hollywood until recently, when it was discovered in an old steamer trunk.

White Shadows in the South Seas was a pioneering undertaking for a major studio at that time. Sending a fairly large company to a remote and relatively primitive area to film a fictional film with Hollywood actors interspersed with the local inhabitants was most unusual, if not unique. And there were the risks in having two directors with entirely different approaches at the helm of one film.

This revealing journal is a personalized narrative of what can happen during a long and faraway location junket and is fraught with internal disputes, frictions, factions, edginess, and the strain of making a film under very trying conditions and circumstances. Finally, there is the portrait of the complex and somewhat paradoxical Van Dyke in his own words telling of the demons afflicting his spirit.

Also recently discovered is an unpublished multipart autobiographical manuscript from 1936 by Van Dyke.

(continued on back flap)

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Bakery bread and canned salmon—prized delicacies for the Tahitians. Unidentified child with director W. S. Van Dyke during location filming on *White Shadows in the South Seas.*

W. S. Van Dyke's Journal

White Shadows in the South Seas (1927–1928)

And Other Van Dyke on Van Dyke

edited and annotated by
Rudy Behlmer

Filmmakers, No. 46

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Once again for Stacey,
and once again for Curt and Anna

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Director Joseph M. Newman shared with me his recollections about working with Van Dyke as an assistant director; Dottie Morey labored long, hard, and very well at the word processor; Janet Lorenz prepared the index in her characteristically meticulous manner; James Curtis carefully read the completed manuscript and had some helpful suggestions; Series Editor Anthony Slide was encouraging and supportive during and after the period this manuscript was being developed. And David Biesel, my editor at Scarecrow, took great care in attention to detail at every stage.

Lastly, members of the Van Dyke family—his widow Ruth, Woody III, Woody IV, and their respective wives, Donna and Brooke—did everything they could to help, including tracking down scrapbooks and other items relating to W. S. Van Dyke II.

Editor's Foreword

Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke II, W. S. Van Dyke, "One-take" Woody Van Dyke, and to his friends simply "Woody" or "Van," had been directing films since 1917—mostly Westerns, melodramas, and serials. In 1926, he signed a contract with M-G-M to direct a new series of Tim McCoy Westerns, but it was a fluke that put him in a position to show that he could handle much more diverse and important films.

White Shadows in the South Seas (1928) was the turning point. Van Dyke spent four months filming in Tahiti, first in collaboration with the noted documentarian Robert Flaherty and then as the sole director. During this period he kept a journal, which he dispatched on the monthly mail boat to the U.S., addressed to a woman in Hollywood named Josephine Chippo, with whom Van Dyke was romantically involved at the time. She had served as his script clerk on the McCoy pictures and would do so again on two future productions. M-G-M, however, had not assigned her to the *White Shadows* company; instead, the script clerk's function was filled by Mrs. Grant Whytock—wife of the film's studio-appointed on-location "supervisor."

The impetus for this book came about in late 1992 with a pair of coincidental donations to the Center for Motion Picture Study, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, in Beverly Hills, California. The first, and most important, involved the partial contents of an old steamer trunk, which had been in the possession of a recently deceased elderly Los Angeles couple. The couple's home and its contents had been willed to their housekeeper, who appealed to a friend for help in disposing of a lifetime's accumulation of personal property. The friend then asked a co-worker, whose husband had a pickup truck, to help them. The husband lent himself and his vehicle

to the housecleaning task, asking for nothing in return—except for what he thought was an "interesting-looking old trunk." The housekeeper, grateful for his assistance, gladly gave him the trunk and its contents—at this point, still sight unseen by all concerned.

Upon cracking open the lock of his new possession, the truck owner discovered mostly clothing dating from about the 1920s. At the bottom, however, was a thick bundle of letters, souvenir items, and motion picture scripts—most bearing the still-familiar Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer name and logo on the cover, and several with "Mr. Van Dyke" written on the cover. There was also a small group of photographs.

The new owner of the old trunk realized that he had stumbled across something interesting and perhaps historically valuable. Calls to several Hollywood organizations led him ultimately to the Academy, where he was connected with the Margaret Herrick Library's acquisitions archivist, Howard Prouty—to whom the name "Josephine Chippo" was meaningless, whereas "Van Dyke" was anything but. The archivist's immediate and unqualified excitement about this discovery—informed by his awareness of *White Shadows* as one of the more notable productions of its time—soon led to the donation of the "Josephine Chippo Collection" to the Academy.

Included in the relatively small collection are personal correspondence and memorabilia, scripts for the films she worked on with Van Dyke, and the original—and probably only—copy of the director's *White Shadows in the South Seas* journal. The journal has never been published, and possibly never seen by anyone except its writer and his 1927-28 recipient in Hollywood.

We know very little about Josephine Chippo apart from her connection with Van Dyke. The fragmentary correspondence in this collection shows that, prior to coming to M-G-M in October 1926, she had been briefly married to a San Francisco architect named Alfred Loewenthal. Further investigation revealed that she had served as secretary and script clerk to child film star Wesley Barry in the early 1920s, but before that and after May 1930—several months after returning from the grueling *Trader Horn* African location (her last job for Van Dyke and M-G-M, and perhaps in the film business)—virtually no other information about her has been unearthed. (No

connection between her and the elderly couple who had saved her trunk was ever established.)

Within a few weeks of the Academy's acquisition of the Josephine Chippo material, another collection was brought in the door: the papers of screenwriter Grover Jones. Included in the Jones files, donated by his widow, is a multipart autobiographical manuscript by—W. S. Van Dyke.

From the evidence at hand, the document had been written in 1936, apparently with magazine serialization in mind. This probably accounts for its presence among Jones' memorabilia, for he was the publisher-editor of *Jones' (A Movie Magazine by Movie Makers),* which ran for less than two years (August 1937 through February 1939) and is virtually forgotten today. The Van Dyke manuscript may well have been submitted to *Jones',* but it was neither published there nor, as far as can be determined, anywhere else.

Upon receiving the news of the Academy's near-simultaneous acquisition of two unpublished Van Dyke manuscripts, I arranged to read them at the Herrick Library. The uniqueness of both items immediately suggested to me the possibility of a book that would bring the two together, along with other Van Dyke writings.

Next in line was to track down the family. Van Dyke died in 1943 and left a widow and three children. Mrs. Van Dyke later remarried and the family moved out of Southern California, so the search had its complications. Eventually I was able to contact Van Dyke's widow, Ruth, and she in turn led me to Woody III (and his son, Woody IV). Fortunately, scrapbooks from the 1920s and 1930s had been saved by the family, and these were a considerable help in putting together some parts of the mosaic. One lone Van Dyke "date book" was lodged with the scrapbooks, and it just happened to be for the year 1927—covering, among other things, the preparations for *White Shadows,* the trip to Tahiti, and the first few weeks at the location.

In my opinion, the journal has considerable interest. *White Shadows in the South Seas* was a pioneering undertaking for a major studio at that time. Sending a fairly large company to a remote and relatively primitive area to film a fictional film with Hollywood actors interspersed with the local inhabitants was most unusual, if not unique. Travelogues, expeditionary documentaries, and the Martin and Osa Johnson camera excursions had been a staple for years, but M-G-M's

attempt to cross pollinate the best of both worlds was a premise fraught with peril. They would have Flaherty—a documentary filmmaker who was used to working leisurely with a handful of people (if that), no script to speak of, no professional actors, and spending two years or more at the location on a project—share the directorial reins with Van Dyke, a film factory director who was accustomed to scripts, budgets, schedules, and moving right along. And peril there was. Of course, the journal is the Van Dyke version—written at the time it was happening from his perspective.

The account is also a behind-the-scenes narrative of what can happen during a long and faraway location junket: internal disputes, frictions, factions, suspicions, cabin fever, edginess, illness, loneliness, and plain old homesickness permeate Van Dyke's writings—to say nothing of the strain of making a film under very trying conditions and circumstances.

And finally there is the portrait of the complex and somewhat paradoxical Van Dyke telling—in a stream of consciousness manner—of the demons afflicting his spirit to an alarming degree as the weeks and months drag on.

Hollywood, Afoot and Horseback

by
W. S. Van Dyke

[Edited portions of autobiographical installments from 1936 intended for magazine serialization, but apparently not published.]

Editor's Note: *San Diego Attorney Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke, only twenty-seven years old, died of organic heart trouble March 22, 1889 — twenty-four hours after the birth of his son, Woody II. Van Dyke and his young wife had been married only a year.*

There was no insurance. My mother, Laura Winston, with a baby to support, went back to the calling she had followed before her marriage—the stage. I was raised in a theatre trunk. When I was six months old, I played a baby in arms in a San Diego theatre. Then we went on the road, up and down the Coast, into the Middle West, all over the United States.

When I was five years old, they starred me at the old San Francisco Grand Opera House in a play first called *The Man Without a Country.* Then the title was changed to *[Ruth the] Blind Girl.* This title-changing business is nothing new. I, much to my disgust, played the little blind girl, in wig and pinafore.

I think I've been to school in every state in the Union. Whenever the company stopped off long enough in any city, I went back behind a school desk. The rest of the time, my mother taught me. I want to say right now that this thing of a boy owing everything to his mother was never truer than in the case of young W. S. Van Dyke.

Van Dyke's mother, Laura, and producer Hunt Stromberg greet the director on his arrival home from New Orleans and Washington in April 1935. (*Courtesy: Bison Archives*)

Everywhere I went, I was the "new boy." It got me into plenty of fights. But it also taught me one thing—if you're going to get your rights, you've got to fight for them.

When I was twelve years old, my grandmother, who lived in Seattle, thought it was about time for me to get ready for high school. She didn't like this idea of my always traveling with the show. I didn't get very far in high school, though. And I didn't want to grow up to be an actor. I wanted adventure. So I started looking for jobs. I was call boy in a railroad station. Then I went out as a house-to-house canvasser for electric vibrators, the first ones invented. Next I got a job driving an express wagon. I clerked in a grocery store. In return for my tuition, I swept the floors in a business college. I graduated, and then I went to work mucking in a mine. There was a tough job. But I was big for my age and I loved it. So much so that I next went bucking logs in a lumber camp.

For several years after that I switched back and forth between the theatre and mining camps. Then came the rush to the Klondike. Seattle and the whole Northwest went mad over gold. I never found any myself, but I worked in camps, helped with the trails, and met the man who was later to get me started in motion pictures—Alexander Pantages, then the owner of a Klondike dance hall.

Finally I decided to go home again to Seattle and returned to the stage once more with my mother. Then, in 1907, I wanted to go up north. I helped build the trail from the headwaters of the Porcupine River through to the Mackenzie. I worked in lumber camps again. And when I'd saved enough I went back to Seattle once more.

Alexander Pantages, who then owned a circuit of vaudeville houses, wanted me to go "over the time" with a Western playlet. It was a success. We landed with the act in Los Angeles in 1915. Hollywood was just beginning to dawn. The city was just becoming picture-conscious.

The story has gone around that I was D. W. Griffith's assistant director on *Intolerance* [1916]. I wasn't; I was his water boy. After Walter Long, my old friend of the stage, got me my first film job the very first day I was in town, I didn't land another for six weeks. I would never have stayed, but these upstage, high and mighty casting directors made me boil. "You don't need to stick around," they'd assure me.

"When we find something, we'll give you a call." I didn't wait for the call, but I did want to show them up.

Then one day David Wark Griffith needed four thousand extras for *Intolerance.* I can see him now, sitting in a chair, looking them over. I was one of the four thousand, doing my best to push through to the front line. Griffith was pointing to somebody over in my direction and I didn't wait to see whom he meant. I ran right over to him, as fast as I could leg it. He picked me out, not as an actor, but as a general handyman and roustabout. I'd move his chair around, carry a water bottle, help shift scenery, act as his messenger boy.

It was a case of hero worship, pure and simple, on my part. You could see at a glance that this man Griffith knew his business. I took advantage of every opportunity I could manage to watch his technique. I'm still trying to do the things I learned from him. He'll always be one of the best friends I've ever had and, by all odds, the best teacher.

I don't believe I was ever an actor at heart. As soon as I started watching the mechanism of production under Griffith, I knew that there was a place for me somewhere in the production end of the business. I talked it over with him one day.

"My boy," advised the great director, "a man should do the thing he is happiest at, for that's the thing he can do best."

I did a little acting, if you could call it that, in *Intolerance.* I was a Roman soldier. And between this effort at picture-acting and being Griffith's handyman, I met those artists who became the first great stars of the screen—Mae Marsh, Bobby Harron, George Siegmann, Henry B. Walthall—grand people, grand friends.

Well, that looked like a good beginning, but after *Intolerance* was finished I just about starved to death. I was living in a rooming house at Cahuenga and Hollywood Boulevards, and wondering every day what to do next. I had written two stage plays, *Sins of the Parent* and *Art for Art's Sake,* which Fred Butler and Charles Nickols had produced in San Francisco, with myself as an actor. Now I turned my hand to scenarios but couldn't sell a thing. I was down to my last thirty-five cents, so I spent a dime of it, or whatever it cost then, for a streetcar ride down to Western Avenue. I had a story down there at the Fox studio, so I thought I might as well pick it up and try to peddle it somewhere else. I tell the girl at the information desk my name.

Van Dyke's old boss, D.W. Griffith, takes over the directorial chores for one scene in Van Dyke's *San Francisco* (1936). (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

"Mr. Wurtzel's been trying to get in touch with you," she replies, and lets me in.

Sol Wurtzel comes right to the point. "How much do you want for your story?"

I tried to look nonchalant and at the same time guess how much he would offer me. I put it as high as I dared. "A thousand."

"O.K.," said Wurtzel, and I've been kicking myself ever since for not asking for five. That story was "Madonna of the North," used as Gladys Brockwell's first starring vehicle under the title of *Sins of Her Parent* [1916].

My first directorial experience came shortly after that, as assistant to Jimmy Young, Clara Kimball Young's husband, on the [Jesse L.] Lasky lot. Our stars included Geraldine Farrar, Lou Tellegen, Marie Doro, Blanche Sweet, Theodore Roberts, Raymond Hatton, and Hobart Bosworth. The first scene I ever directed alone was with Marie Doro, Hobart Bosworth, and Theodore Roberts. I remember I had a grand argument with Roberts as to how it should be done. We compromised by doing it first his way, then my way, and when I did the cutting I used my version, not his.

I did all of Jimmy Young's cutting. Though we were both employed by Lasky, I always regarded him as my sole boss and when he was let go, I went with him back to Chicago to make pictures for Essanay. "Broncho Billy" Anderson, the Western star, was a half partner in the firm, he and George K. Spoor owning it. Hence the name, which is simply the spelling out of "S and A"—Spoor and Anderson. We made *On Trial* [1917] for Essanay, and then they decided to send me back West for a series of four Westerns which I had written: *Land of Long Shadows* [1917], *The Range Boss* [1917], *Open Places* [1917], and *Men of the Desert* [1918]. I wrote them, directed them, and cut them, at a total cost of $80,000 for the four. What they paid me gave me enough to provide for my mother so that she could retire from the stage.

But no sooner had I finished this series than I was drafted for the Army. Never got out of the country, though. When I returned to work it was to the precarious calling of the free-lance....

They handed me the megaphone on the first million-dollar deluxe serial thriller, *The Hawk's Trail,* in 1920. The stars were King Baggot and Rhea Mitchell. King was not only a star for eight years in the days

of the silents, he also became one of the leading directors. Rhea Mitchell, an early Orpheum circuit star, began her screen career with the old Lasky company.

Years later, when we started casting *San Francisco* in 1935, set in a period of some thirty years back, I began wondering where were the stars of yesterday? So we put the casting office to work and found King Baggot and Rhea Mitchell and a flock of my other old friends besides. One of the greatest thrills I ever had was in seeing them back at work with me. There were Flora Finch, queen of film comedy twenty-five years ago when she and John Bunny shared honors; Naomi Childers of the old Vitagraph days; Mahlon Hamilton, leading star of fifteen years ago; Fritzi Brunette of the early Yankee Films; Helene Chadwick, former star of the Astra-Pathé pictures; Frank Mayo, Donald Hall, Al Shean of Gallagher and Shean, Harry Myers, Rosemary Theby, Jean Acker, first wife of Rudolph Valentino; Gertrude Astor, Lillian Rich, Kathleen Key, my old friend Eddie Hearn, Wilbur Mack, Jane Talent, Russell Simpson, Mary MacLaren, Myrtle Stedman, Bob Ingersoll, Arthur Belasco — we'd almost all "known one another when."

I made the first Jack Dempsey serial right after his fight with Willard. I remember the title: *Daredevil Jack* [1920]. Jack...was used to running things his own way. I was having trouble, so I called him into the office and pulled the biggest bluff I ever tried.

"You may be a champ to other people," I told him, "but to me you're just another ham actor. Come on down off your perch."

And Dempsey laughed. What if he'd slugged me? From that time on, I began making friends of prizefighters.

I got off on the wrong foot with another serial—a couple of them, in fact [*The Avenging Arrow* (1921) and *White Eagle* (1922)]. Ruth Roland was the star and I was the director, but you'd never have known it. The way that girl looked right through me, I might as well not have been there. What I'd done, I never did find out. Must have tried to be tough, or something. We acted like a couple of blood feudists out of the hills.

It wasn't until the premiere of *White Shadows in the South Seas* in 1928 that we got together. She came up after the show and told me she thought the picture was swell. I told her I thought she was swell. We've been pals ever since.

Eleven of "the stars of yesterday" requested by Van Dyke to appear in *San Francisco*. Some had bit parts, others worked as extras. (L. to r.): Rhea Mitchell, Naomi Childers, Rosemary Theby, Eddie Hearn, Fritzi Brunette, Frank Mayo, Helene Chadwick, Flora Finch, Harry Myers, Lillian Rich, and King Baggot. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Mostly I worked for the independents, those makers of "quickies" along Gower Street in the region known as Poverty Row. No retakes. You shot a scene once and it had to be right. They never spent a dime unless it showed on the screen. A few feet of waste film meant a man's job. We worked day and night.

We hired a certain star, worked him two days and nights for all the scenes in which his face appeared, then got a double and used him for all the other scenes with his back to the camera — running after his horse, and things like that.

All this was fine...and the best training in the world, but it didn't last. And so the same old story all over again, making the rounds, trying to peddle a story, looking for any odd job. Long weeks between work. Then months. It got so that I'd done nothing for an entire year. Nobody could see me for dust. Westerns and serials were going out of fashion and producers couldn't imagine me doing anything else. The same sort of thing had happened to my pal Edgar Kennedy, who had been playing heavy and comedy parts. The two of us moved into a tiny flat on Western Avenue, did our own cooking, and made our livings, such as they were, by playing golf and poker.

Just about the time I had decided to ship out on an oil tanker, *Forget Me Not* [1922] was thrown my way. But Metro handed me Bessie Love for the lead. I can't remember why, but I had some sort of an obsession about Bessie Love and what she could play. "Please," I yelled, "not Bessie. I'll wear a wig and do it myself." I, who had been about to go out as wiper on a tanker. Bessie hadn't been working more than two days when I publicly apologized. That was just one of the times I was wrong. I seem to have made a habit of it.

Some of the stunting we used to do in the old days was more funny than dangerous and we did it principally to save money. I remember in one Poverty Row epic we turned out, we had to show an actor riding like the wind on a horse. Now the way to do that is to have a camera on a truck running alongside. But the producer didn't have enough money to hire a truck. So we went out to a little valley with mountains on all sides, set up the camera with a tripod that permitted it to turn around, and then the rider rode in a circle, the camera turning and following him. Of course, the background was duplicated each time the circle was made, but we kept it a little out of focus, and the job

was perfect. Only trouble was that our rider went round and round so much, he got dizzy.

Who was the rider? Jean Hersholt.

When I first arrived in Hollywood, stars rode their horses onto the set and stayed on them the rest of the day. Whenever I think of horses, I think of Carole Lombard. What we did to her with a horse was a crime. I had her in a Buck Jones Fox Western, *Hearts and Spurs* [1925]. She couldn't have been a day over sixteen and she was—yes, she was fat, if I do say so. She'd look at you with those big blue eyes of hers, just inviting a ribbing. And she got it.

We framed it one day so that a guy rode out of the corral on what looked like a mean, backfiring, he-devil of a horse. He purposely took a nosedive off it, but to Carole it looked like the real thing. While four others grabbed the horse, Buck and I took hold of Carole, threw her in the saddle and tied her on. She may have been scared, but she never uttered a peep. Except just as we let the beast loose, she moaned something about, "I hope I drop off on my head. That's the softest part of me. If it wasn't, I wouldn't be here."

And I thought the kid was dumb and couldn't take it! I've been wrong so many times, anyway. Of course, the gag was that the horse was trained to buck only when the signal was given. As soon as we let him loose with the girl on his back, he merely trotted over to the nearest bale of hay and started eating his breakfast. Any time any star gives me that old line about "Mr. Van Dyke, I owe so much to you," I just laugh and think of Lombard. They've got to have what it takes in the first place. If a director can get that quality to show on the screen, he's just lucky.

Back when I first tried to break into the business, there were plenty of top-billed players who didn't have the slightest idea what to do when they got in front of a camera. Some of them had to be told half a dozen times before it began to sink in. I've even known instances where the star didn't know what picture he or she was playing in.

Because today the stars are supposed to know their jobs, I'd rather spend more time with the lesser players. They've got more reason to be nervous and high-strung. One bad performance may not be nearly so fatal for a star as for a minor player. Oh, stars have their moods, just like you and me. But if there's temperament and trouble, it's probably the director's fault as much as theirs.

We don't always follow the script word for word, nor do we shoot "off the cuff." If somebody has an idea in the middle of a scene and it works out well, we use it. But we don't experiment needlessly. A director's principal job, I believe, is to instill enthusiasm in his players for the spirit of the picture.

Any reputation I've acquired for fast work is due solely to the fact that during twenty years I've learned why such a thing will work and why something else won't, and I put all my energy behind the thing I know will work. That's the one great lesson I learned from D. W. Griffith, the one great artist the picture business ever developed.

When *The Covered Wagon* had its premiere at Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in 1923, Colonel Tim McCoy, Indian expert, was brought for the prologue [on the stage] with a band of braves. Here, for me, was a kindred spirit. We'd both lived somewhat the same sort of lives; we were both adventurers still. We soon became close friends.

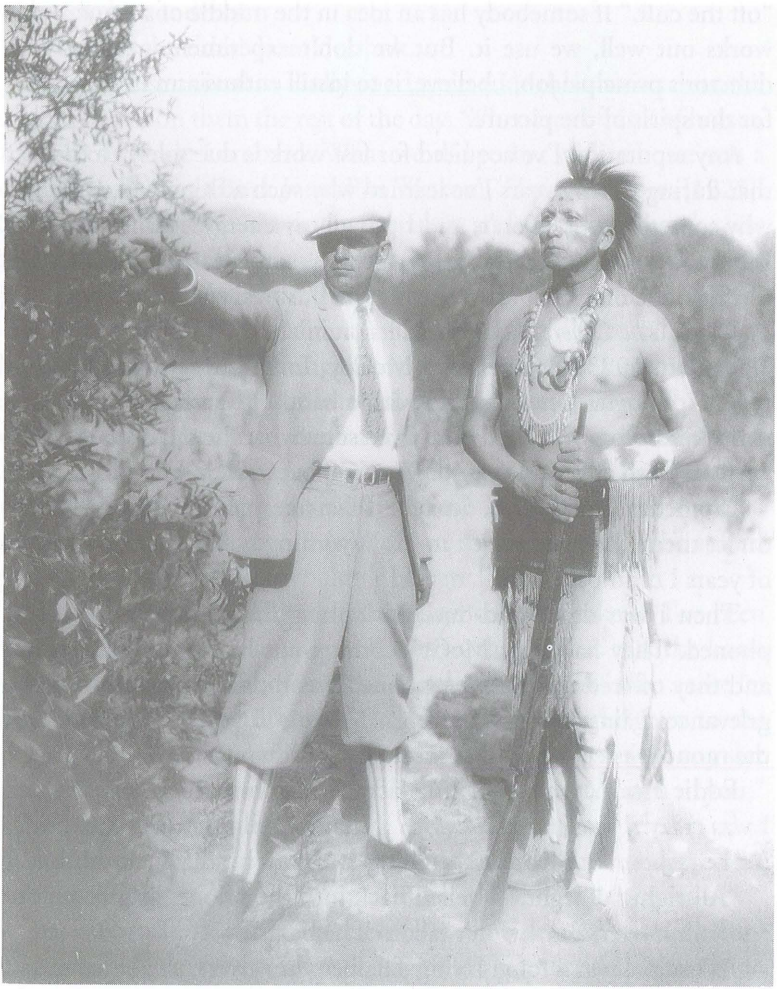
"Someday," said Tim, "maybe I'll make pictures. Maybe you'll direct them." He went back to his Wyoming ranch and for a couple of years I didn't see him.

Then I was down-and-out and looking for a job when M-G-M phoned. They had Tim McCoy coming out here as a Western star and they offered me the megaphone. I, at the time, thought I had a grievance against Irving Thalberg. "Metro?," I yelled right back into the mouthpiece, "I wouldn't work for you if you gave me the place."

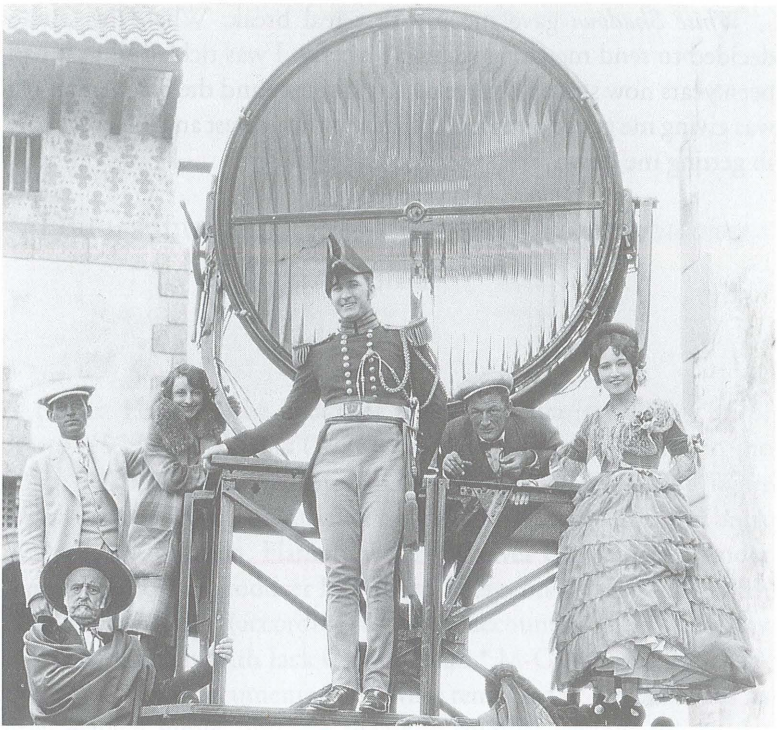
Eddie Hearn, who was sitting across the room, must have decided I was crazy. He came at me with a chair. "Tell them you'll consider it," he rasped, "or I'll break this thing over your head, you numbskull."

"All right, all right," I yelled back into the phone. "I'll come out and talk it over. But I won't talk to Thalberg."

As usual, I was wrong. Irving Thalberg has given me a squarer deal than anyone I ever worked for. We made some of the pictures at the McCoy ranch, some in various Western locales. *California* [1927], *Foreign Devils* [1927], *Spoilers of the West* [1927], *Wyoming* [1928] were a few of them. Joan Crawford played the lead in one of them [*Winners of the Wilderness* (1927)]. If I had been looking for prospective stellar talent and if [director] Robert Flaherty hadn't been making preparations for filming *White Shadows in the South Seas,* I might have turned crystal-gazer and seen what Joan was going to be someday.



Van Dyke and Chief Big Tree (playing the historical Chief Pontiac) on location for *Winners of the Wilderness* (1927). (*Courtesy Bison Archives*)



During the filming of *California* (1927). (L. to r.): Frank Currier (below), Van Dyke, Josephine Chippo, Tim McCoy, Clyde De Vinna, and Dorothy Sebastian. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

White Shadows gave me my first real break. When the studio decided to send me along to help Flaherty, I was tickled silly. It had been years now since I'd traveled any distance and the old wanderlust was giving me goose pimples....That was the nearest any job ever came to getting me down.

Editor's Introduction to Van Dyke's *White Shadows* Journal

Robert Flaherty, the maker of the documentaries *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926), the latter filmed in Samoa in the South Pacific, was signed by M-G-M in June 1927 to film *White Shadows in the South Seas,* based on the 1919 anecdotal travel book by Frederick O'Brien. Flaherty went to Culver City to work, under the supervision of producer Hunt Stromberg, on a script—first with Laurence Stallings (according to some accounts), then with Ray Doyle, and finally with Jack Cunningham.* M-G-M wanted a narrative film—not a documentary. So what remained of the book was its title, general locale, and the thematic colonial exploitation of the Polynesians—a *Paradise Lost* concept.

The fictional film story that evolved tells of Matthew Lloyd, a disenchanted, alcoholic doctor, living as a beachcomber on an island in the South Seas. He defends the natives against Sebastian, an unscrupulous pearl trader, and as a result Sebastian has Lloyd shanghaied aboard a plagued schooner that is set adrift. Eventually the vessel is caught in a typhoon and Lloyd is washed ashore on an island where the natives, who have never seen a white man before, revere him as a god. Lloyd and Fayaway, the daughter of the chief, fall in love. In time, Lloyd is completely regenerated. But this idyllic life is interrupted by the arrival of Sebastian's trading ship. Lloyd pleads with the natives to keep Sebastian and his men off the island, but then Lloyd is shot

*There are no Stallings drafts of any kind in the M-G-M script collections, although there are several by Doyle and Cunningham in addition to earlier drafts by Eugene Walter and a play version and outline sketch of a scenario by the book's author, Frederick O'Brien.

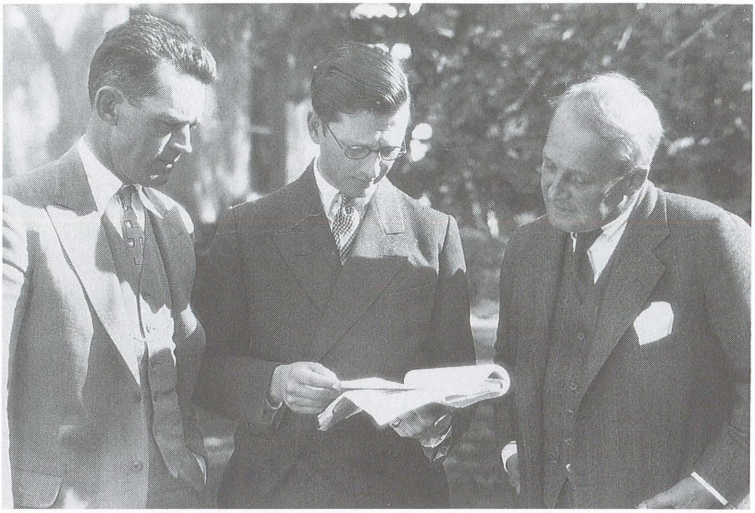
by a member of Sebastian's crew. After his death the white man's shadows—greed, lust, cruelty, drunkenness, and disease—dominate the island as the result of Sebastian establishing his trading post.

Variety stated in its December 14, 1927, issue that John P. McCarthy, a director under contract to M-G-M at the time, refused to co-direct with Flaherty on the project. We do know that Van Dyke was first approached regarding *White Shadows* in October 1927. His "Date Book" has the first entry regarding the film on October 23: "Read South Sea story." Then on the 24th: "Read other version of South Sea story—better." On October 25: "Bought eight South Sea books." On November 3: "Arguing over South Sea story and taking tests." November 9: "Taken off [Tim] McCoy story so could devote time to South Sea story." November 17: "Story done but not satisfying. Redrafting first part personally." November 22: "On changes. First clash." November 29: "Leaving tonight for Frisco." November 30: "Boarded *Tahiti* [ship] 1:30 p.m."

At this point, the leading roles had not been definitely cast. The Hollywood players and the bulk of the crew were to follow on the next ship — in one month's time. But Flaherty and Van Dyke were aboard, with Stromberg remaining at the studio in Culver City.

As already discussed in the foreword, this was a trouble-filled assignment; a filming expedition which was slated at the outset to last approximately five or six months. The difficulties inherent in making a picture of this type, particularly in those days, at a location 3,600 miles away were formidable. Everything had to be set up from scratch in Tahiti: a small-scale studio, village sets, offices, living quarters, commissary, laboratory, screening room, etc.—all done with mostly untrained native help. And, as previously noted, there were the potential risks in having two directors at the helm of one film.

Although there have been various interpretations as to how the duties of Flaherty and Van Dyke were to be divided, from all evidence the most accurate and "official" description appeared in the trade publication *Film Daily* on November 6, 1927: "W. S. Van Dyke will aid in direction. Flaherty will handle all atmosphere shots and direct the expedition, while Van Dyke will be in charge of dramatic sequences."



Van Dyke, producer Hunt Stromberg, and Robert Flaherty "discussing the script" in a posed publicity shot for *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928) at M-G-M, November 1927. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Van Dyke checking out the equipment at Station 6BZN in Culver City, which was used to maintain communications with the *White Shadows* company in Tahiti during the four-month shoot in 1927-1928. F. E. Milton, the station's owner, at right. (*Courtesy: MOMA*)

Van Dyke's *White Shadows in the South Seas* Journal
(1927-1928)

Sent monthly by ship from Tahiti to Josephine
Chippo in Hollywood, California

Dec. 10, '27

Hello my babe —

Just arrived in Papeete [Tahiti] and am writing this in a hurry to get it into the mail....It was certainly beautiful coming in this morning. I got up at 4:30 so as to be sure not to miss anything. The island is lovely as far as I have gotten but haven't had a chance to look around much yet. The hotel is rather primitive but guess I can make out alright....

Didn't realize that you were quite so dear to me. How you would enjoy it down here. Hope to God I can make the company see the light and send you down as I really need you [in her capacity as script clerk]....

Loving you and only you every minute,

Van

Dec. 11, '27

I am learning to write on a typewriter with one hand. In that manner I can scratch mosquito bites with the other. I never thought anything could think as much of one person as they seem to think of me. They cling about me with the persistency and quantity of my own hair.

Well, we have toured the land by walking and by jitney [small bus]: We have toured the water by swimming and by boat. [William "Billy"] Leeds is sending for his flying machine and when it gets here I will tour it that way. It is a marvelous country and a wonderful sea. The natives and the inhabitants are delightful people. The climate is ideal and the island represents just a small corner of heaven. And after I have said all of that I want to quietly remark that I have had all I want of it already and wish to God that I was back in Hollywood.

I guess that I am unromantic and unimaginative and un everything else, but all I can see to this country is that it is a great weekend spot. There is an atmosphere of quiet, lazy grace about the place that is rather appealing, but one even gets tired of that. The liquor is first class and I am tired of that. The women have a certain savage beauty but I have no desire to give myself a chance to get tired of them....

Picked out a location today right under some very tall palms where the coconuts can drop on you from any angle. Am taking out plenty additional insurance....They say that the sun shines down here sometime. I haven't seen it yet. It has rained plenty.

Dec. 12, '27

I am rapidly becoming a South Sea Island iconoclast. When I got up this morning, the tide was out and the beach looked dirty and nasty. Said I was going to do a lot of swimming when I got down here and I am not doing, and because no one will give me a positive assurance that the sharks will not nibble at me. In fact, [interpreter Bill] Bambridge said yesterday that they might be more than willing to insofar as my skin was something new and fresh to the island. Something like chewing gum after swallowing tobacco; and that sharks were very curious.

Went downstairs for coffee and it was a terrible repetition of the terrible muddy stuff with hot milk in it that they call by that name. The melons were tasteless and the eggs anemic. It is no wonder that the natives all have terrible teeth. Their teeth never get any exercise. They can chew everything up with their gums except the steak I had for lunch today and teeth wouldn't have done them any good with that anyway. I find myself eating stuff that I don't like because I am getting hungry....

Everything droops. Even the foliage. A tree will spring up like it is going somewhere and then the leaves will lean over and droop toward the earth as if trying to grab ahold. Everything is tired. There doesn't seem to be a semblance of native life left on the island. Everything is of the bastardized variety. The natives are not altogether French and the French are only partly native. The Chinese are the most individual of the population.... And it looks like there might be more Chinamen on the island than either natives or French....

American money down here is like having an ace in the hole. All in all, the more I see of foreign climes, the stronger I am for America.

Dec. 12, '27*

Hello Babe,

...It has rained everyday since we arrived but maybe it will have rained itself out by the time we start work. I sure hope so as I never wanted to get home so badly in my life. Saw a ship pull out for the States yesterday and could have cried. Would like to have said a whole lot more in my wire last night but a certain member of the company [cameraman Clyde De Vinna] was sending it so thought I hadn't better.

This is a country of first impressions. It is beautiful on arrival and then it begins to wane rapidly. As long as you can hypnotize yourself on first impressions, you will get along alright, but it will not stand for analysis.

Am very anxious to hear what you are doing and how the dogs are getting along....The man that said that absence makes the heart grow fonder should have had a hand in writing the Bible because it is a gospel truth as far as I am concerned.

We have the two main locations found and they are starting to build the villages. Will have to build both villages almost entirely. Am laying off of the liquor down here as it does not make you feel so good the next day. I really think that we have better alcohol in the States [illegally made during Prohibition] than they have here in their good liquor....

Wired the studio for you last night but have my doubts if I get you [in her capacity as script clerk]. Also wired for other help that we will need badly and probably won't get any of it. Well, that is done and as there is nothing else to do, I don't know of anything better to do or anything I would rather do than to write to you. Unless it were to talk to you. I had KFON and KNX on my little radio last night but there was tremendous lot of noise and I wasn't hooked up very well anyway. Will have a better layout tonight. It gave me a thrill anyway. Am going to try and get KMTR tonight and if I can pull them in alright then

*This is a letter written on the 12th, which is in addition to the journal entry with the same date shown previously.

we will get M-G-M to give us a program every Saturday night. I believe that is their night.* It will sure make us feel good—me particularly....

Another day has passed, thank the good Lord. It is terrible when you start numbering the days and you are only at the beginning. Got this darn [typewriter] maçhine fixed, thank goodness. It is just a question as to how long it will stay fixed. It would have handed the gang a good laugh last night to have seen me literally dragged into a bridge game because if I hadn't played it would have offended some of the natives here. But I was only supposed to play until [Robert] Flaherty got back from someplace, but he never came back and I had to sit there and play until nearly midnight or bust up the game. Never was so bored to death in my life.

Well, the gang is getting the lab and the sets ready and I should be able to start shooting very shortly. Incidentally, the government here has got to read the story before we can shoot and I have got to dictate an entirely different story. So you can imagine about how handy you would come in at the present moment. As it is, have got to use a French kid and God only knows how good he is.

Well, my darling, I have got to get this aboard that boat and it may be a lot of effort wasted as you may never get it. But if you don't I can keep on thinking of you anyway and wishing you were here....

[*Interpolation by Van Dyke from the original* White Shadows *Program Booklet*]

> We built a complete motion picture studio, with developing, printing and projection rooms, together with living quarters for ourselves and the hundreds of natives we had by that time collected for the picture.
>
> If you've never tried to build a motion picture studio five thousand miles from a base of supplies, my advice is, "Don't." For anyone not on the scene while we slaved, it will be

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*"The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Hour" commenced on KHJ (in Los Angeles) Saturday, December 31, 1927, 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.

difficult to understand the trials we endured meeting that problem. We had to build all our own equipment, dryers, developing tanks, and other essential paraphernalia out of anything that came to hand—and do it all, mind you, with native labor that never handled a saw or drove a nail.

Dec. 13, '27

Nothing particularly happened today. Stayed sober....

Flaherty gave me heart failure yesterday for a moment or two when he said that he would like to live here for the rest of his life. But after I had had him arrested and the alienists had examined him, they pronounced him more or less sane and harmless. I shall, however, keep him under observation. [Unit manager Art] Smith nearly got us in bad yesterday by not understanding the native custom and tried to run our one Ford up the steps of a home and park it on the porch. The steps gave way and so did the Ford and so did Smith....

Dec. 14, '27

...Met the American vice consul yesterday. A very proficient drinker. Also met the great grandson of the king of this island. He is as good as the vice consul. Both married to Tahitian wives. The governor wants to read our story to see if there is anything therein derogatory to the natives. If he ever reads that script we will get nudged right off the island. It would be a good way to get back home. But loyalty to my company and fidelity to my art prompt me to write another story which will have nothing to do with us but which will make very nice reading for the gov....

When you get in and on the island, the vegetation is very beautiful at first sight and more plentiful and tropical, of course, than Catalina [Island], but when you have seen it for a few days you begin to notice the ugly features also; such as the dead and dried foliage that clings to the green; the worm holes and the damp rot on the barks. You begin to notice the mosquitos and other bugs that make it their home, and then it begins to dawn on you that this tropical beauty also has its

A typical Tahitian panorama photographed for *White Shadows.* (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

ugliness and that it is not the immaculate thing that South Sea enthusiasts are continually harping on.

The bay is beautiful and I would like to swim in it but I am reminded of the constant danger of sharks. The natives are plentiful and I would like to get out and play with them but I am told that the great majority of them are full of syphilis. The houses are all old, bare and very uncomfortable. I am writing this on an upper porch of one and as I strike each key of the typewriter, the porch trembles. But at the same time, the house looked very quaint and picturesque when I first saw it. As long as one can kid themself on South Sea first impression, the country is wonderful; but if you get a little analytical, then you begin to appreciate home. Many of the natives have no home and they carry a mat under there arm and sleep in the doorways of the main stores and streets at night. Down here that is supposed to be a very quaint picturesque habit. Back home we would throw the bums into jail....

I am severe in this criticism only because the enthusiasts have gone to the other extreme. The South Seas are only unusual. If one's disposition leans that way, the most they can say is that they like Tahiti better than Hollywood.

[Interpolation by Van Dyke from his "Date Book"]

December 15, '27

Had first run-in with Flaherty over [his] telling the story [of the film] to governor.

Dec. 15, '27

. . . Got so thirsty for some decent coffee yesterday that I purchased an alcohol lamp and a percolator, which I had all kinds of trouble finding as no one seemed to know what they were, but found one and the only one in town. It cost more than a bicycle. Then I got some American coffee and came home and had a feast. It certainly tasted good. So good that I made up my mind to have a little more of America. So got some laborers and strung a wireless to tune in on some Coast stations, and although it was noisy—so noisy that in the States we would have turned it off—at the same time I don't think I ever heard anything so beautiful...

Dec. 20, '27

...Sent my resignation into the studio today.

Expect L. B. Mayer to come hopping down here on the next train to placate me and raise my salary, begging me to kiss and make up.... Heard a funeral hymn, too. A native chief had died and the natives were all gathered about to sing about it for forty-eight hours steady. Afterward they had a big feast and when everyone's appetite was satisfied, they went out and buried the old fellow. Don't know what he died of unless it was the song...

We went out...to pick out some good looking natives. What a chance. Such a thing is turning out to be a myth....

Dec. 21, '27

There are two things about the island that I can recommend with reservations. One is the warm ocean water, if one likes warm ocean water. And the cool shower here in the hotel, if one likes a cool shower. Have gotten so that I just chew on my food....

Rode for quite a while looking at different locations yesterday and as a result I have a slight concussion of the back today. Bet old man Noah thought he was lucky when he got rid of the tub we rode in. Ford in all his glory never provided more rattles nor Edison more jolts. The island looks very much the same all the way around. Had hoped to find a little snow maybe on the southern side but all we found was some hot rain.

This country is rapidly making a prohibitionist out of me. Not through any moral or philosophical reason but just as a matter of desire. It is all so easy to get that it is totally uninteresting....

Have been sadly disillusioned in regard to the beauty of native women. I even heard someone say something once about native charm. It is all a delusion and a snare. If they are beautiful then I am Adonis.

[Interpolation by Van Dyke from his "Date Book"]

Dec. 24, '27

> Got wire from studio regarding clash. Had long talk with Flaherty and Smith and advised Flaherty to wire studio his opinion of matter. He has left [to go] location hunting with party of ten.

☆

Xmas

But you would never know it....Had a real native dinner today, raw fish and all....Liked the raw fish because it was different—very. The oysters somewhat resemble what we call an oyster at home and the raw clams were splendid.

With all of this we had liquid refreshment of several varieties, principal of which is the native rum. Wow! If they ever take native rum and fashion an explosive out of it they could blow up a continent. After I had had about three drinks and climbed the highest tree on the island, we settled down to more gentle spirits such as absinthe, Benedictine, and what they call cockcoo. It is of the same family as rum.

Tried sleeping in the ocean last night for the first time but was very uncomfortable as the bottom was rocky and the water kept getting into my nose, waking me up.

Hereafter I shall make a weekly diary as there is not enough in any one day to remember.

Xmas

Papeete, Tahiti,
Society Islands, Hades.

...Am slowly losing all hope of your coming down here and that is another thorn in the side of my discontent. Tried resigning but the company refused to accept it. Would not come on another trip of this kind unless you were along if they gave me the studio. Can't even talk to you as I would like to over the radio on account of your damned affair with Clyde [De Vinna].* He is doing all the sending and know that you would rather I would not hurt his feelings....

I will be fighting myself by the time I leave this hell hole.... When it comes right down to cases, if you were here it might even change my attitude toward the whole company and country. As it is, Flaherty and I have clashed. [Art] Smith and I have gone to the bat, and I would

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*At the time of location filming on the Tim McCoy Westerns directed by Van Dyke and photographed by De Vinna in late 1926 and/or 1927.

fight with my own grandmother. Don't think I shall write anymore until I get into a little better humor. This can't be very nice reading for you.

Next Day

...Have sent an ultimatum to the company advising them that I am not staying here forever. Don't suppose they will pay any attention to it. They know that I am here and stubborn enough to finish a job I start if they don't pull me off, but I would not care to have a director make a picture for me who cared as little for the job as I do. The company is giving everybody's wife that wants to come a nice trip down here and are even sending down an extra native girl because she is good looking in spite of the fact that there are about three thousand on the island....

They haven't yet told me who the leading lady is. Maybe it is a secret. Had Monte Blue in a picture [*Loving Lies* (1924)] before and had a big fight with him. This will be a great place to settle that argument....

Wired you regarding my Mother [a practicioner] doing a little [Christian] Science work for me to see if I can't snap out of this mood I am in. Every day only seems to make it harder for me. Well, a hundred years from now, no one will care a damn.

Went out to shoot some tests today with Clyde and he is just beginning to realize what it is going to mean to him to be without an assistant. He had a slight clash with Smith. Before we get away from here I am afraid everyone will be cutting everyone else's throat. Smith has proven himself a terrible double crosser. Have learned that every time I wired the studio for more help, he would wire back and say that it was not necessary. Try and find him on another picture with me under any circumstances.* I understand that they are going to create a job of script clerk out of Mr. [Grant] Whytock's wife. He is to be the supervisor down here. You will be able to see the fireworks clear back there in Hollywood.

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*Smith never worked with Van Dyke again.

Well, I guess that I have groaned and wept enough. Getting so I am carrying a tear bucket around in either hand. Wish to God they had sent down the lights I asked for as I could get done so much faster. It does not rain all the time but it is cloudy most of the time. And as it is very dark in under the foliage down here, we will be able to do nothing without the sun. So for God's sake, pray that we have sun. Intend to shoot what stuff I am supposed to shoot and then I am coming home, Flaherty or no Flaherty, company or no company, and that is all the crabbing that I shall do for today....

By the way, Long Beach and KNX come in very nicely over my little portable. There is quite a lot of noise but not nearly so much as there was in Wyoming [filming some Tim McCoy pictures]....

Another Day Nearly Gone

....Started to get busy today by getting a barge anchored out on the reef in preparation for some diving shots. If we can get the sun tomorrow we should get quite a little work done. Will be awfully glad when the bunch get here and we start to work in earnest, although I know that I am going to be heartsick again when the boat pulls in and you are not on it. Can't tell you how terribly disappointed I am at your not coming down and how I am going to miss you until I get back.

Clyde and Smith had another run in today and I am smiling yet. You should have seen them anchor the barge. It was a madhouse with everyone yelling and gesticulating and nothing being done that was worth the effort. I never raised a hand or a voice to help. With a couple of good men, could have done the whole thing in fifteen minutes. And that is only a marker as to just what we are going to run up against....

[Dec. 29, '27]

Still another day, baby,

...Have been working with the natives all morning. They are not bad to work with....Was going to let them handle their own barge again today but about three or four quit on us last night, so I took hold today for fear they would all walk out on us. Got some very fine submarine stuff. [First scenes photographed.] The natives are wonder-

ful in the water. One of them went down about fifty feet today and stayed down about two minutes. Understand that they can go much deeper than that and stay longer but it is unnecessary as we can not see them when they go down even fifty feet, and as far as their staying down any longer than that is concerned, we can of course cheat on that with the camera.

Am waiting for Flaherty to get back from the islands where he has gone to try and get some great type natives. He certainly knows how to go look for locations. 1400 francs worth of liquor. I don't think he knows yet that the company is not paying for the liquor....These natives...are very nice and hospitable; very easy to please, and they like everything and everybody and will do anything for you gladly, no matter how much trouble it is....

Jan. 1, '28

It is New Year's Day and I am not a bit happy....Have made a New Year's resolution and that is that I will drink nothing but beer so long as I am on the island. Made the resolution after making sure that [Billy] Leeds' airplane was going to arrive O.K. Am not getting along with the natives so well, as I am having a hard time making them understand me. It is true that I have an interpreter [Bambridge] but am going to have to have an interpreter for him. The only English they understand down here is "Have a drink" and "Bonjour"....

Well, the boat will be in in another six days and we can start to work in earnest. And how I shall work. If anybody in this company ever saw me work fast, they should see the way I intend to shoot this picture. Intend starting to work at six-thirty a.m. and quitting at six-thirty p.m. The whole gang are over in a house across the street where there is a big party going on and you can hear them for blocks. Am getting so I am keeping more or less to myself as I don't want them to catch any more of my mood than is possible....

The Day After.

...They are still New Yearing down here, but I shot nearly all day. It helps to pass the time. Time is getting to be a mania with me. I know just how a man must feel just getting out of prison. That is the

way I will feel the day I leave the damned island. Will never be able to tell anyone just how utterly I hate this job. Can't say a word about it around the gang for fear of spoiling what they call the morale. Although I guess that I have said enough so that they know exactly how I feel.... Tried to get some more underwater stuff done this morning but the wind came up and the scow was too hard to manage, so gave it up for the time being. Managed to kill half of the morning in that manner anyway, so that was something accomplished.

Have gone on the water wagon. Does that sound funny? As a matter of fact, I didn't want to particularly, but there are two very vital reasons why I must. In the first place, I am too low the next day; secondly, I know that if I get the least bit lit, I am apt to pop off down here and say or do something that I might be very sorry for. So from now on, I am drinking nothing but beer. The beer is not so good either. Not nearly so good as our near beer at home. It hasn't got the twang and the bite to it. It tastes like our near beer does when ours is flat.

Flaherty got back from location without accomplishing a thing. I permitted him to pick the village location without comment and he certainly picked a bloomer. But it is him for it and not me. Had to laugh last night, or rather this morning, when our lab man [Wilson] Leahy had worked all night in developing the stuff that Flaherty shot during the trip (and he worked all night only because Flaherty was very urgent in the matter) and come to find out a big bulk of the stuff is shots of Flaherty and his gang doing hula dances on the trip and holding big parties. Leahy was crazy mad....

[L. B.] Mayer is sending [George] Kann, his personal representative, down here. Don't know whether he thinks he is coming down here to intimidate me or not. But certainly hope he has no such idea — for his sake. M-G-M doesn't mean any more to me down here than some hot dog stand at Venice. In fact, I could be much more polite to a vender of the heated bow wow. Hope and trust that you are having a good time and give my best to all the gang. So long for today.

...Can't tell you what a terrible state I have been in down here. Now, as to the promise I spoke to you about. To be very frank, I don't just know what it was but can imagine it is one of three things. Not to fall

in love with someone else — not to be intimate with anyone else— or not to drink too much. I have done none of the three....

Was out all day today looking for some shots of sharks. Had a half a dead cow hung down in the water but nary a shark all day. Smith and I had another run in today which would have been serious had we both been in the same boat but fortunately, both boats were too widely separated for a good healthy leap or one of us would have been in the ocean. Well, it is all in the day's play....The company gets in day after tomorrow. Sure will be glad to see them get here....

☆

It sure did me a world of good just to have a few words with you last night....

Shot a few more closeups and one thing and another this morning. The gang get in tomorrow. Will give them a couple of days to get set and then work will begin in earnest....

I am sorry that it should have to be Clyde who is to do the sending and the receiving as I would like to talk much more freely. For God's sake, read between the lines....

☆

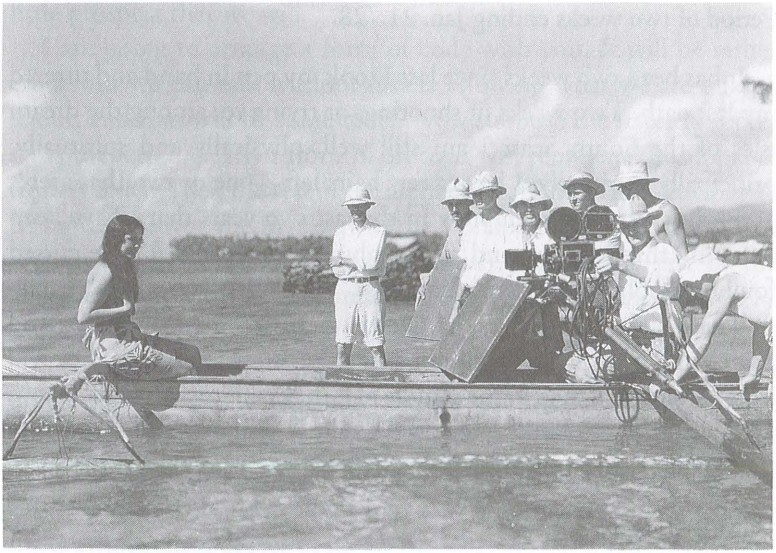
The mail got in yesterday and it was like finding an oasis in the desert. Your sweet letter came to hand among the last....

Well, the gang got in all O.K. About a hundred people including men, women, and children — and about three of them are useful. It made me sick when I think of how I need help down here and see the mob that came down and then think of what a help? they are going to be. Had a long talk with Kann and think that I made more or less of an impression in regard to how badly I need help, but you can never tell. I don't give him so much. Don't forget to let me know if you got my letter from the Italian or French boat.

The two girls the company sent down [Raquel Torres and Rena Bush] are rather cute but both have bobbed hair, and the one they sent down for the lead [Torres] is a little bit cockeyed but maybe it won't show. I wired the studio telling them to tell the girl to sunburn on the way down, but of course she didn't do it and she is way too light to work with the other natives and is going to have to make up....

Just after the second ship from San Francisco carrying members of the *White Shadows* company arrived in Tahiti in January 1928. (L. to r.): Art Smith, Monte Blue, Rena Bush, Van Dyke, unidentified French government official, George Kann, Raquel Torres, Robert Flaherty, Robert Anderson, and Grant Whytock. (*Courtesy: MOMA*)

Left to right: Unidentified assistant cameraman hired in Tahiti, Clyde De Vinna, Robert Flaherty, Art Smith (with his arm around Flaherty), Van Dyke in director's chair, Monte Blue without shirt, and Grant Whytock crouching at far right. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)



Raquel Torres in an outrigger canoe scene. Van Dyke center; De Vinna behind the camera. (*Courtesy: MOMA*)

I disagree with you about [Monte] Blue. Think that he is a very good type and will play it well. The only other man I could see in the part was [William (Bill)] Boyd....

The Week Following New Year's.

Another week has passed and still the island is here....

Have listened to several thousand stories about how to bait and catch sharks. Tried two of them. Killed a cow and cut it up and hung the meat in the water and then hovered over it for a day only to have one of the divers finally convince me that the meat was much too fresh and far too much of a delicacy for the local shark. It appears that he likes his meat well aged. So got an old horse that died several years ago of starvation but obstinately continued to breathe. Well, we put him out of his misery and hung him in the depths with gashed bowels for a day and a night and then went out the next morning to photograph the sharks. The sharks were nowhere in sight. Neither was the horse. They had even eaten the two-ton pig iron weight. Never saw such ravenous creatures. I think ultimately the only way we are going to get a shark is to hang our property man in the water and trail him along behind a boat.

Period of two weeks ending Jan. 21, '28.

It has been two weeks since last I took my pen in hand and uttered my last oath. Two weeks of shooting, or trying to, among the dream isles of the South Seas? I am still well, physically and spiritually, principally spiritually; I have a few hairs left—one or two that aren't grey—but I have aged rapidly in the last two years that I have been here; my throat is raw and my vocabulary exhausted. I have cursed foully, volubly, and at great length.

These dear natives are harder to picturize than animals. And principally because they will not take the matter seriously. They will start a scene well, then in the middle of it they will stop to laugh. Strove with might and main to make them take it seriously and when they finally did, they got dumb.

Have also found a new way of reckoning time: watch the shaving stick and see how fast it disappears. I have made up my mind to shave every day—for no reason—except the exercise.

Nearly had a collapse the other morning. Had finally managed to locate some very good tasting doughnuts, and went to bed that night with a smile on my face and had pleasant dreams of my own coffee and doughnuts the next morning. But alack, I bounced out of bed the next morning only to find that one of the...island dogs had sneaked in during the night and purloined my breakfast. There are no doors on the houses here and that is why he got in. Don't know why they put a wall around the house. When it rains the dogs all come into the house after you have gone to bed, sleep all night there, and then leave before you get up. Not particularly your dog, but anyone's dog. The dogs are as impartial down here as the morals.

Hello Darlin'....

Again I couldn't say over the wire what I wanted to on account of Clyde. Would love to have told you much more...but couldn't....

Another day....

It is storming again today and have not shot a scene yet and very little prospect that we will.

I am going to arrange a form of code with you. It will be rather crude but we can talk without others knowing what we are talking about, and that will be some relief. Now suppose the letter N represents the letter A. Then from N on to Z will represent the alphabet from A to M. Then the rest of the alphabet from M to Z inclusive will be represented by the first part of the alphabet, that is from A to M inclusive, only reversed (going backward) making the rest of the alphabet from M to Z be represented like going backwards from M to A....

This form of code is very tricky and it is very easy to make a mistake unless you practice it every day and be sure that you always check yourself on your messages. Use it only when you want to say something important (or sweet). You can't be too careful as it is very easy to make a mistake. And don't lose this code sheet. You had better make two or three copies of it.

Didn't think I would write any more today but have got to do something or go mad. I don't know what the hell is the matter with me. I never so thoroughly detested a place or a job in my life. I have been in the most squalid and miserable places under the worst possible conditions but never have I felt toward them as I feel toward this job and place. If hell were any worse than this I will cease from sinning from now on. Could honestly get some relief by putting my fist through a wall. There isn't money enough in the world to have made me take this job had I known what it was going to be like. I miss you worse than I ever thought it possible to miss anyone. And a damn sight more than I ever missed anyone in my life. M-G-M has taken a few months of my life and put them on a hot griddle and watched them fry.

Am sitting here now drinking beer. Don't dare drink anything else because I know me well enough to know that if I got drunk in my present mood, would pick out the first little opportunity that presented itself for a fight and would land in the French jail down here, and God knows I am taking no chance on prolonging my stay here.

Would like to get a little more news and a little more word from you now and then, but suppose that is asking too much. Notice that you wrote ten letters in the twenty-eight days I have been gone when you said you were going to write every day, but I suppose that I should take that as a good average anyway. Could repeat every one of them by heart. Of course, you would get them numbered all wrong. Don't pay any attention if I seem crabby to you. Would be the same to one of the apostles. Am getting so that I can't give a decent word to anyone anymore.

Am making one final attempt to get you down here. Am clinging to a little hope that it may succeed. Would send you a ticket in a minute if it were not for the light that it might place you in. If the damn fools had a lick of sense, they would see through a millstone with a hole in it and for their own benefit they would send you....

I just hope to God that you have been as loyal to my love for you as I have been to my memories of you. But I was bitten personally once pretty badly and I have seen so much of the so-called honesty of women that you will pardon me if I seem just a little suspicious....

It is storming out like mad. Haven't shot a scene all day. Guess I will let this go for today. Started to say something in code and got it backwards. Will try again....

[Jan 27, '28]

Well, this is Friday and another day has gone but we haven't accomplished a damn thing on account of the rain. It has rained blue murder for two days. If it keeps up much longer I am going to go mad.

We had a final conference last night in which I again made a demand of Kann for you [as script clerk] and Clyde's assistant [cameraman]. Maybe I will get them and maybe I won't. It looks very much now like I would be held here until the March boat. That nearly kills me too. Poor old [grip Albert "Pop"] Arnold. He has enough of the country by now too, and he is pining to get back. Flaherty is the only one that is at all anxious to stay and I think that he is more than half nutty. As far as I am concerned, although I hate to admit it, I think that you are more or less the cause of my discontent. If you were here I am pretty sure it would put a different aspect on things. I expect Monte to begin crying any day.

I think maybe there is a possibility of their sending down lights, and if they do that will help out a lot. We certainly need them bad enough. The rain is not so usual down here but the clouds are and we can't shoot a thing when it is cloudy....

Well, we got two or three shots done today. It has rained with that terrible insistency that you felt all the way through the play of *Rain* [1922]. It comes down steadily and hard until you think it is raining as hard as it can and as hard as you ever hope to see it rain, and then the roar on the tin roof will mount until you can't hear yourself talk above a shout. Every moment this country grows harder for me to bear....

After trying up to one-thirty last night, I finally got you only to ask if there were any news and you said—"No." That was all. Would very much have liked a little word of some kind but there was none. Sent another appeal to my mother last night. Think that I am going nutty....

Shouldn't talk that way, should I. Do you remember *White Cargo?* [the 1923 play] ....

☆

It has been several days since I finished the last—and what days! Everyone hates everyone else's gut. They are fighting like mad. Flaherty doesn't know a thing.... I have never seen a troop in a more deplorable condition. I am spending my days running around trying to pat them on the back and telling them to carry on as we will get home all the quicker. They are not sore at me, and when I am shooting they behave alright, but the minute Flaherty starts in, they start.

I sent [actor and close friend] Eddie Hearn word to hold the checks for a while until the next boat gets in and I learn more of the intentions of the company. There may be another director on board and they may be letting me out, and if that is the case I am apt to need the money we would spend on a car very badly, so continue to drive the Chandler [automobile] until I know something definite....

In regard to your working for [Harry] Cohn [at Columbia Pictures], I guess I would be terribly jealous of you no matter who you were working for, so you suit yourself about that. Only play fair....

You will have gotten my last letter by this time. Hope you were a little bit anxious for it. It is funny that no one, particularly you, let me know when the dog died [presumably Van Dyke's]. There is going to be a lot of hell raised in a great many quarters when I get home and you can bet your bottom dollar on that....

Well, another day is about over....

I suppose that you have heard that the lights are coming down. They had to send Mayer's personal representative [Kann] down here to tell them what I told them before I left the studio. He is getting his bellyful too, but can't seem to lay his finger on the trouble. He will find out eventually.

Still another day....

Am beginning to believe we cannot finish here till April. Two more months. I say that with the same feeling I would have if I said two more centuries. Every day is a month....When I think of M-G-M not sending you and just taking a few months out of my life for the sake

of their damned old profits, it just makes me sick, and worse, it makes an anarchist out of me. Would love to throw a bomb into Mayer's office. Flaherty has been on one location now for a week that should have been finished in three hours. I am letting them do it as I am waiting for the lights. But as soon as they arrive, I am going to do what I have to do and then pick a fight and get sent home. Wish I could write something beside grief to you once in a while, my dear, but there is nothing else to write about. I am not communicating with the company anymore at all. Have not sent a single wire or letter in over a month. Am letting the multitude of help they sent down do all the talking and wiring and writing. The last wire I sent to the company read as follows:

> Conditions here growing more acutely formidable. Wish to go on record as predicting story will never be made within financial limit. Difficulties not only of racial or geographic nature. I am becoming terrified and feel that it is only just to suggest the best interests of the company might possibly be served by another director more thoroughly reliable than myself and one in whom the company could have greater confidence. Would suggest one of the apostles, as miracles are needed here. It is difficult for me to admit this, but in justice to you and self, must say that I feel unequal to the job and would not want to go on without your knowing exactly how I felt. I would, of course, do my best under any circumstances: am not easily frightened and am not a quitter, but want you to completely understand that the chances of making a great picture such as you expect, for anywhere near the amount named to me, is, in my humble opinion, negligible. This is my last word of advice or complaint. Hereafter, will govern my actions fully and finally in accord with desires and commands of supervisors, production managers, and co-directors there and here. With but one exception. I will not remain in South Sea exile forever for anyone. Regards to all.

Don't know how I could have sent any more. I can't very well tell them to go to hell and jump the next boat. The consequences to me back there would be disastrous....

☆

Have had the flu for three or four days now and yesterday it seemed to reach its acute stage. Was feeling so rotten, finally got up and dragged myself up to the radio in the hope of getting a word with you but it was wasted effort. Finally did get in touch with Mother to have her do some [Christian Science] work for me. Things are getting no better fast here....

☆

Have tried in vain several times lately to get you again over the radio, and have made my last attempt when I sent a personal appeal to you to send me the little scraps of news that I know any one of my several friends would be glad to do if they knew that I was not getting them. If you do not do this I will appeal to them. The funny part of it is that I heard you complain before I left that there did not seem to be anything that you could do for me. My God, if you only knew just what a little gossip would mean to us now and then....

☆

I wonder if it isn't a little inconsistent to say that you didn't want to worry me about the dog's death in one breath and then in the next you write — I don't know what, now. Think I am going nutty. Wish I would. Had to quit writing on the machine. A key kept sticking and I kicked the damn thing off the stool....

☆

Things are reaching a head here—it looks like I will have to do the entire picture. I know it will come to that sooner or later; or else as an alternative I will be taken off of it altogether. In the event that I take charge, I am sending for you. You can't imagine what a hopeless chaotic state things are in. You would never believe it possible among thinking men and women....

Feb. 7

Watched the boat pull out for the States today. We were working on the beach and she loomed up out on the ocean. We watched her go hull down and finally disappear under the horizon. There was

nothing left but a windblown trail of black smoke that reminded me of a funeral veil. God—I was so terribly depressed. Some of the gang tried to joke about it but no one laughed—all joking fell flat. It was the same boat that will bring the mail back to us. What will happen between now and then—I wonder?... Twenty-eight days before she comes back and I get anything very decisive. Twenty-eight days of wondering and thinking and thinking and thinking. Isn't it a shame that one can't stop thinking—shut it off like they do a hydrant? If one could only localize their thinking so that one wouldn't have to think of one thing when one is supposed to be thinking of another....

We are through the day's work and I am drunk, thank you. Can't get the vision of that boat sailing away out of my mind....

☆

[*Interpolation by Van Dyke from the original* White Shadows *Program Booklet*]

> The generator arrived....The huge machine with its motor weighed nearly ten tons. The natives called it *Pereoo-Mahana,* meaning "Sun-Wagon." The first night we tried it we threw a beam of light across a lagoon five miles wide, completely demoralizing with fear the natives of the village on the other side. Moving the gigantic searchlight from place to place was also attended with difficulty. We broke down a half-dozen Tahitian bridges. They weren't built for such weight and we had to stop and reinforce all of them. At another location we found that we had to cross a half-mile stretch of lagoon three feet deep. The generator proved to be water-going as well and made the trip under its own power.
>
> While filming the scenes in and around the water, the schooner we were using ran aground in a storm. There we remained for six hours before the seas quieted and a boat could come to our rescue.
>
> Although Tahiti itself is only 120 miles in circumference, it has mountains 7,000 feet high and more than eighty rivers to carry off the tremendous rainfall. The interior is a vast, uninhabited and impenetrable jungle, and the few accessible

mountains were so steep that we suffered great physical hardships to transport our equipment to the tops.

☆

Another day is nearly done. Walked off of the set this morning at ten o'clock—just couldn't stand it any longer. Have been under such a nervous strain for so long, that had I stayed another minute I would have been a maniac. Suppose I will be severely reproached tonight when they get in. They better make me laugh if they start riding me. I am in damn little humor to take anything from anyone.

Called Kann a louse and a liar last night and was a little ashamed of myself afterwards as there is a possibility that the entire blame for something rests with another man and that he (Kann) is being fooled himself. Anyway, it goes to show what a mess things are in. On top of that is my misunderstanding with you—Jesus!....

☆

Did a little better today. Managed to stay on the set until after lunch. Am getting pretty good—but it is a heartbreaking experience....

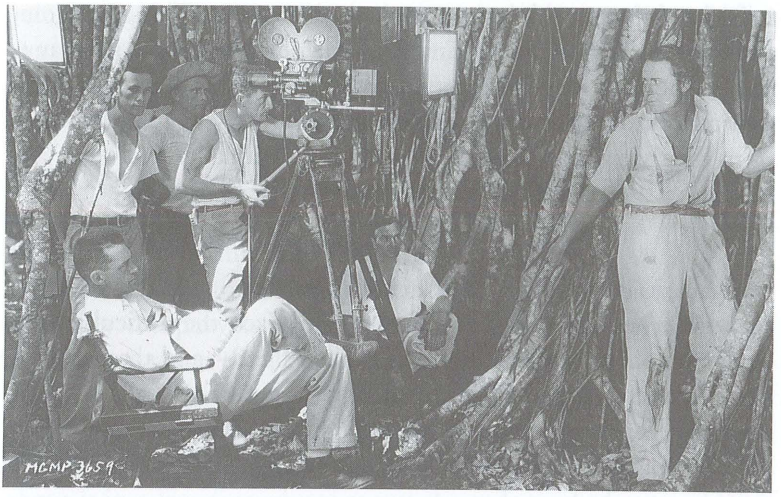
Flaherty sprung a good one yesterday. Said he found it very hard to get decent girls to work in the picture, and then said he thought that was because of Bill Bambridge's (our interpreter) reputation as a rake....

The March boat is by now an impossibility. The first April boat is getting further and further away....

☆

Well, I have gotten all fed up on this job and wired you last night to phone [M-G-M production executive Bernard] Hyman to see if he can do anything to get me off. I simply hate to walk off the job and catch the next boat but that is what is going to happen unless the situation is relieved some way. Am sick to get home. Don't care a damn how rotten the situation is there; it cannot be worse than it is here. They have just put up a damn little cheap merry-go-round right across the street under my window and the damn thing is going to drive me mad. Every note on the organ is off center and screeching like ten thousand demons loosed from hell....

☆



Filming Monte Blue in a dense, tropical Tahitian forest. Van Dyke in director's chair; Clyde De Vinna on camera. (*Courtesy: Bison Archives*)

Filming a romantic scene with Monte Blue and Raquel Torres in a huge banyan tree. The branches apparently growing downwards are actually roots. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Have to write this in longhand as it is too early to use machine. It is 4:15 a.m. Just couldn't sleep any longer, so got up. Things are going from bad to worse here continually. One never knows which way to jump. There are so many supervisors and generals on this outfit. From now on I am shutting my mouth like a clam and trying to direct scenes from their viewpoint—sinking my own individuality and ideas, and bowing to their better (?) judgment....

☆

Again it is too early to use machine. Got a wire from Bernie [Hyman], but all he said was that they realized the difficulties and depended on me—and I had never failed them—and that his gang never quit, etc.—and a little more along the same line—all encouraging me to continue bumping my head against a stone wall and saying it feels great. The only great feeling there will be about it is when I quit.

Tried to get you last night to send an answer to Bernie, but was told you were out—didn't know where or when you would be back....

☆

It is Sunday—a bright sunshiny day with beautiful clouds on the horizon. An ideal day for shooting—and the damn fools have decided to take the day off. It will likely be raining again tomorrow.

Well, it is a little late in the day — the hours are slowly dragging themselves along. It is funny to see the gang all standing around like lost souls, constantly looking northward, trying to figure out what it is all about and trying to figure some way to spend the day. With the exception of [propman] Harry Albiez. He is having the time of his life....

☆

Two days since I have written. Have been asked to take over the entire company and make all of the picture.... Am using the pencil as it is again too late and too early to use the machine.

Have had to retake all of Flaherty's stuff. It was putrid. He not only knows nothing about pictures but also nothing of natives. Will be able to tell you some very funny things when I get home (when I get home). My God, when will that be? The time seems interminable. Have lost seven pounds, and am growing a beard. Also my hair is short. Know

you would love me if you could see me now. Am growing the beard because it annoys me terribly, but as it is a new and petty kind of an annoyance, I am enjoying the variety. I look like hell with its back broke and glad of it. I look no worse than I feel....

☆

Two days since the last. Still plugging away like an old horse that has no idea where it is going or why or how long but is awfully tired and has ceased to think and just plugs....

Was sure that for a while I would get you down here, but the goddamn company is impossible. This fellow Kann who is down here...seems rather nice, but he is scared to call his life his own. Mrs. Blue is coming down on the March boat and I asked Monte if she had a traveling companion and he said no and when I mentioned you, he seemed to be very pleased with the idea, and so I am going to wire you about it in a few days when you get the code worked out and see if you would care to come. If so, will give you the trip. So long for this evening, my darling....

☆

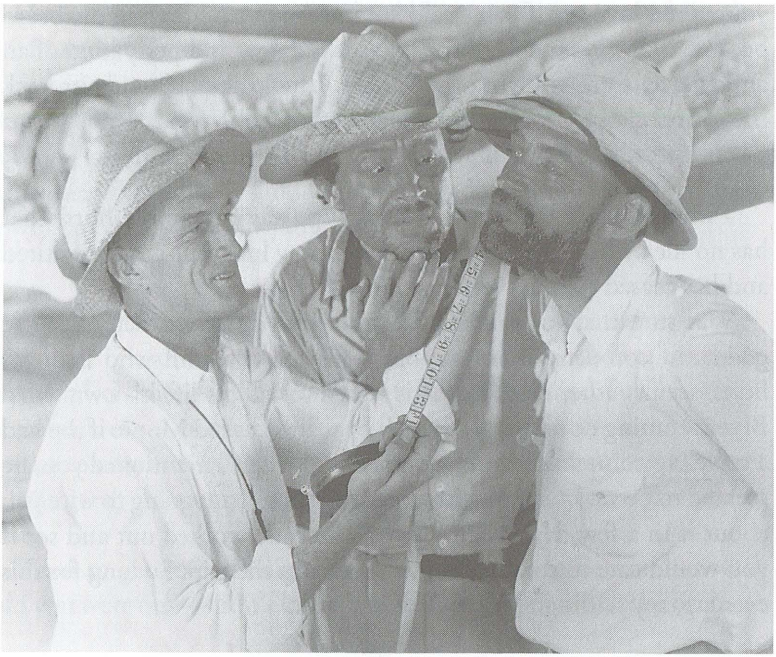
Work is getting along pretty good but working with natives and only one actor in the troop (Blue) would try the patience of a saint. Neither one of the girls can do a damn thing. I have got to drill them in every move they make. It is time to go to work, kid, so I will call this off....

☆

Hello kid, I haven't written for a couple of days.... Am feeling better than I have felt in a long time. And have felt that way for the last couple of days....It is raining today and we only worked this morning. Got up this morning at three-twenty. Wasn't that a silly thing to do? But just couldn't get to sleep and can't lay in bed awake....There is no news, except that things are progressing a little more rapidly than they were. Have not seen Flaherty but once since they took him off of the picture and then only for a second....*

---

*Flaherty left Tahiti on the March boat. The March 21 *Variety* reported that "Flaherty...returned to Hollywood last week under orders. He was co- directing with W. S. Van Dyke, but a difference of opinion arose. M-G-M sided with Van Dyke,...who is continuing alone..."



Clyde De Vinna measures Van Dyke's beard while Monte Blue expresses mock distress. (*Courtesy: Bison Archives*)

My beard is nearly to my knees. Don't know whether to braid it or get a bob. Am enclosing a picture or two. Hope that you like the effect....

☆

Excuse me while I go take a nice big slug of Gordon gin—real Gordon. Ohhhh! That is burning clear down to my toes. Am going to have to cut out this booze thing or it is going to knock me for a dozen loops. One of these days I will get sore at myself and do so. It is all in the day's gulp. When in doubt, have a drink....

Since writing the last line, a number of things have happened. In the first place Blue came up and we had two or three drinks, so if what I write is not quite coherent from here on, think nothing of it. The second, third, or forth event was an answer from you. And what a sweet answer....

Well, sweetheart of mine, will get an answer off tomorrow as it is too late tonight and have run into another difficulty. Clyde and Sparky (the operator at your end) don't like code messages. So will send over government wire hereafter and will not expect answer (or so many) from you....

☆

Can't begin to tell you of all the trouble we are having here and would not be surprised if they sent another director on any boat. Would be just as well- satisfied. Have had all of this picture that I want and am not over-keen to assume the responsibility....Making a two-dollar picture with one actor is quite a little job. However it goes, will know that it is the best thing, and feel more satisfied now to accept what comes and ask no whys nor wheres....

☆

It is 3:45 a.m. and I have risen and had my coffee. Just naturally woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. Funny thing happened last

night. Got a wire from [L. B.] Mayer saying he had exercised option on my contract. You would think by this time they wouldn't want to, and be glad to get rid of me. Had another battle with supervisors here yesterday, and am still mad but feel so much better than I have for three months....

We are leaving for location at six this morning. Nice jolly hour to rout everyone out. We go about twenty miles by car, half-mile by boat, another few hundred yards by shanks' mare....

☆

We are slowly but surely getting through. Was surprised to know that the studio was renewing my contract as I have raised enough hell down here to get me fired a half a dozen times. Nearly struck [Grant] Whytock yesterday. They aggravate me at times beyond endurance. Won't finish any more of this until after I hear (maybe) from you tonight....

☆

We are not shooting today as the gang are moving to a new location quite a distance from the last one and there is a lot of stuff to move.

Gee, this picture sure is dragging along. Frankly don't expect very much from it when it is over. Imagine trying to make a picture like this with one actor. If you remember the script at all, you will remember that it was full of small parts and bits. The leading lady [Raquel Torres]...requires as much rehearsing as the natives, and with them you have just got to go through it time and time again until they get the idea....

Since getting your last wire, I feel much more cheerful about things....

☆

Dear heart of mine —

I have not written for a day or two as I have been so damn mad.... Whytock is rapidly reaching the point where I am going to reach out and get him, and when I do, I am going to pinch. He has written a new continuity on the Hikueru sequence [Act One] without my knowledge, consent or O.K. And we are to shoot it all over again. Hardly think that we will catch that first April boat now. Am just sick about it. Gave them the ultimatum that I am going to catch the last

April boat if I have to quit the picture to do it. Have grown more or less used to the damn place now and things are not so objectionable to me....

☆

Hello darling....

It is one o'clock a.m., and am writing this on my knee in bed, so forgive the scrawl. Am up at the radio station every night of my life until I come home and go to bed—for no other reason than I may hear something from you. Once in a while I do. The mail comes in tomorrow. Am dying to get your letter....

☆

Had another big disappointment last night. Blue has decided not to bring his wife down. That means that if I do not catch that April 1st boat—it will be two months yet before I see you. Two months may not sound like much to you, but it is like the word eternity down here....

By the way, there is a Paramount company aboard. Karl Brown, the boy that made *Stark Love* [1927], is coming down here to do one. Don't think he has anyone with him save a cameraman and staff. Think he is going to attempt another *Stark Love* using only natives*....

That damn ship has turned around and is just sailing up and down. Guess she is afraid to tackle the passage of the reef in the dark. A Yankee skipper would have had her alongside of the dock by now. It would be an experience if you could feel the same way the whole gang feels about getting home—HOME!...

Guess I won't be able to stay overnight in Frisco as I had rather planned on doing, as I will have some storm ship stuff to do with Monte at the studio and only four days to do it in before his contract is up.

That damn ship is still sailing around aimlessly. Everyone is praying for a continual sun as there is a chance that we might catch the April 1st boat. Well, darling, guess this is all I can say till I get your dear letter....

---

*Not produced — or at least not completed and/or released.

☆

The boat got here O.K. and I got your two letters....

You telling me to take my time on the picture is funny. They begged me so to do that, both here and at the studio; special cables were sent when I finally gave my promise. You would have thought that the armistice had been re-signed. And I am keeping the idiotic promise, shooting much slower than is necessary even, just to satisfy....

Zina's* and my Mother's attitude is easily understood. They think I am being hooked by some vamp and merely want to protect me.... Am sorry they were not nicer about it, but try and understand, kid, and be tolerant. After all, the mental arrows of another cannot hurt you unless you barb them with you own thoughts. They were in the wrong and you should not suffer for the mistakes of others....

Got drunk with Karl Brown last night. He passed right out of the picture. Have been doing a lot of heavy drinking, dear, but promise you I will cut it out beginning today, if that makes you feel any better....

☆

Came the dawn and with it the typewriter. Bet you are good and sick of trying to read my writing by this time. Yes, there are several white women down here—mostly French. Some of them not bad to look at, but I have not said a half a dozen words to any of them, to say nothing of falling in love with any of them.

Wouldn't look at them or any other woman but you right now if they moved all of Hollywood down here.... Don't know what it is down here but have lost all sexual desire for women. Rarely think of such a thing...

☆

Another boat has gone. Felt depressed enough before it left. If it wasn't for that idiotic promise to you, would go out and get howling drunk....

Am having a constant fight staving off a breakdown. Sometimes I can almost hear my brain cracking....

---

*Van Dyke's wife, from whom he had been separated since 1923. They had married in 1909.

Got in only a half-a-day's work today on account of moving locations and weather. Every half-day makes the first April boat more remote. God!...

Sending back one of the electricians on this boat. The damned island knocked him out quick. Everyone has lost weight. [Cameraman] Bob Roberts' little girl has lost ten pounds and they are worried stiff.

[March 6]

It is nine p.m. I am sitting strip naked in the middle of the bed and the perspiration is rolling off of me. Every member of the company has a prickly heat rash all over them. I don't feel clean any more—my beard is to my knees nearly, my throat sore, tonsils swollen, have had a perpetual cold ever since arriving on the damned island. And everyone else is in the same fix.

The gang are all snapping and fighting each other. Am constantly stepping in between some of them. The only relief is that work is getting done faster than heretofore. If I can just hold out without going nutty, may get back to the States again. Oh, hell, I'm going to try and get to sleep. Incidentally, have had a small glass of light wine in two days....

Hope I am not laid up again today. My interiors [filming] about exhausted, thanks to the mismanagement of the brains down here. And it is already the sixth of March. Only twenty-five days till that first April boat and loads of work to be done. Don't think I can make it....

Didn't shoot a scene all day. Clouds and rain....

Had another glass of wine today. Getting to be an awful drunkard. Only drank that because the people insisted that I drink something....

You would get a big laugh if you could see the gang sit around when there is nothing to do. Think [grip Albert "Pop"] Arnold is the most disgusted one of the outfit. He will look out to sea and shake his head

in a disgusted manner, and then look ashore and repeat the performance. He will watch a native walk past and do the same thing.... [Propman] Harry Albiez has at last gotten next to himself....Clyde's assistant got drunk and fired and now Clyde has no assistant. He is getting very hard to handle. He has both Harry and Arnold sore half the time. He is terribly unreasonable....Carries everything too far. Bob Roberts is drinking rather heavily....

Got a wire from the studio to the effect that they liked all of the first stuff I sent in very much. That has put a little damper on the intense supervision. Also got word from the studio that they cannot make heads or tales out of the [script and/or camera] report. That also pleases me very much. I hope they have a hell of a time cutting. Kann dislikes [unit manager Art] Smith very much. That also pleases me. Smith was talking to one of the boys, that he didn't know was such a friend of mine, and knocked the devil out of me. Blamed me for all the mess that we have had down here....Kann is the only egg who seems to be more or less O.K....

Guess that is enough kicking for tonight — nighty-night.

☆

Another day is gone—somehow. And we didn't shoot a scene. Not a damn scene. Got set up but the light was so bad that it would have looked bad, and as it is very important stuff I decided to take the chance and call it off. If I can stay on my feet for another six weeks I guess that we will have enough of it done for Whytock or someone to go out and finish up. Then I can lay down. Getting so tired it is an effort to drag up and down stairs. I tell you my nerves are on the ragged edge of nothing. And can't seem to get hold of myself. Every time I do get a good grip, something else happens and I go all to hell again. Made an ass of myself at the table tonight by suddenly going haywire and throwing dishes. But just couldn't stand the damned mechanical piano any longer. Would have jumped out the window in another second if I hadn't exploded. Want to go out and go on a big drunk....

Had a lousy night of it too. Never had so much trouble getting sleep as I am having here. In the first place, you lay on top of the bed without a thing on and sweat until one spot is so wet that you have to wake up and move over into a new spot. The beds are like rocks and the pillows like mattresses.

Have at last gotten busy on that play I promised myself that I was going to write, but am in damn bum mood to try and write anything. Clyde just handed me a cable from you with the word—"Sorry." Well, so am I, kid. I am probably sorrier and more often than you are. You can help it—I can't....Just adding a bit that will hand you a chuckle. Clyde phoned saying there was a message at the station for me from you. Of course, I broke all my resolutions and hurried over.... Instantly I...broke another resolution by answering it at once.... But you were—out! As per usual. Is that funny or isn't it? Needless to say, I laughed all the way home. Expect to laugh myself to sleep. Maybe you don't see the joke. Well, it was 11:30 when Sparky [the radio operator in Culver City] called you. Must have been another late picture show?...

☆

Have just come from the projecting room. The stuff is all looking marvelous. And De Vinna is giving me some of the greatest photography I have ever seen on any screen....

The April boat is out. But the May boat is assured. Will reach Los [Angeles] somewhere around the fifteenth of May....

Am absolutely taking no more chances on going to bed so sore at myself and the world that I curse myself to sleep.

It is remarkable how much cursing the gang is doing. Ladies make no difference to them. They curse when they talk in fun. They show Mrs. Whytock no respect whatever.

It is clouding up again tonight. That is another pleasant prospect. Will say many a prayer when this is over. Although it will never be entirely over with me. It has left its mark on me...and I think for the rest of my life it will lurk in the back of my mind as some fearful nightmare or bogy[man] that will get me if I don't watch out. Am getting so I even feel different to myself. Guess that that is just a mind vagary (you can get plenty of them down here too) but at the same time it is not very pleasant.

☆

Well, everyone has been a great help in the making of the picture. If it is good, I shall be the most surprised person on earth. Don't see how it can be, but will hope for it. Don't know what I would have done had it not been for my [Christian] Science. Have read more of

it since being down here than I ever did in my life. I know of several times I would have cracked had I not rushed madly home and begun reading. My Mother helped me a lot too.

As far as I personally am concerned, things are as bad as they ever were, but the work is getting along faster. That helps the rest of the bunch and that is a little off of my mind. It is funny when I look back and think of what a beefer they thought I was when I first landed and now they are all kicking like bay steers. Getting up and going out and leaving their meals untouched—flying off the handle about nothing whatever—not sleeping well—and moaning about one thing and another all the time.

Expect Flaherty will have plenty to tell the studio when he gets back. Wait till this bunch gets back. What they will have to say when they get back. All except me. There were about forty-two versions of the crucifixion. Everyone had something to say about it except the one who was crucified. Think that I am about the only one who was really crucified on this picture, so will emulate a very good example and say nothing....

The wind is coming up. The wind here is like a rattler on the tail of the rain. It always gives warning before striking. Can expect rain now in anywhere from five to ten minutes.

☆

It is exactly 2:45—a.m. Am I not the early bird. Just can't sleep....

The [Art] Smiths have had everyone in the company out to their place to dinner but me.... The two girls [Raquel Torres and Rena Bush] down here are not speaking to each other. You see, the company failed to tell them, before they left the studio, which one was to play the lead, although the studio had definitely decided on the Mexican [Torres]. Well, of course, jealousy started the ball rolling and now I am getting the brunt of it....

☆

It has been raining for the last three days. Had a few little interiors that I could clean up on and have. Now the only thing to do is to pray for sun....

☆

1:30 a.m. Can't get to sleep to save my soul. Have tried reading, walking, counting sheep, and thinking. Tried everything but getting drunk. This is my sixth or seventh day without drinking anything but a little light wine. And haven't suffered a bit.

Startled the company yesterday by shaving my beard and leaving on a hideous mustache. Everyone wanted to know how many cases I had landed. Without a doubt, am the most god-awful looking thing in a mustache you ever saw. They all want to know why I let myself look that way. I can only answer — why not?...

☆

Well, well, well! There is that old grey sky again, slowly but surely burning whiter every minute, and storming like the devil. Pleasant outlook, and you 4,000 miles away....I keep saying, cheer up, it won't last forever—but what is forever? Is it not an eternity of now? A constant, persistent, reiterating now. Now, now, now! This second, this instant, this fraction thereof? What is the future but the eternal beginning of now? What is the past but the forever ending of now? Is there no middle distance—no intermediate point that we can place a finger on and say, "This is the halt, this is the pause? This is that which you are to enjoy to the full while it comes—ere it goes?" No! Life is one long lap dissolve with neither the end of the last picture nor the beginning of the next quite clear. It is true we can sometimes keep our eyes focused on a highlight which lingers longer than the rest, but it is only a highlight — not tangible, hardly real—just a glow; sometimes warmed by it, often chilled. The thing that lasts the longest in life is a memory—but that is only a longer, slower dissolve. With the rest, in time, they fade too....

Don't know what started the above line of chatter. Guess it is because I am in such a lousy mood....

☆

Rained and stormed all the day. Dark, gloomy and terrible. Haven't seen much of anybody all day. They all seemed to have holed themselves up somewhere like I have....

☆

Cleared a little today and we managed to get in some work; not much, but enough to help out like the devil. I think everyone would

die now if we didn't make that May boat. Still have a lot of work to do but think that I am pretty safe. I bragged too soon yesterday....

Got your cheery little wire this morning from Clyde and it was like a good bracer. Am answering it over the government wire as Clyde is getting so touchy that I don't intend sending anything more through him. Think he has a very bad touch of head. I have let him take his time, plenty of it, have helped him on his [camera] setups and often switched [staging] business to make his composition better, and he has gotten some very fine photography as a result. Think it has gone to the upper story. Poor old Arnold, who is under Clyde continually, swears that he will starve before he ever works for him again.* He makes it tough for all the boys and if it is not stopped, I am going to lay into him in no uncertain terms and if necessary, knock his cockeyed block off. I think he has less judgment, and carries things much too far; more than anyone I ever knew. It is great while he is doing the riding, but let any of the bunch begin to ride him. It is a different story....

[March 14]

Four o'clock and all's well. The sky looks clear and there is every promise of a good day. They can't give me too much sun from now on. Don't care how hot it gets— just give me the sun. This month is passing somehow. Today is the 14th. As everyone will say when they get up, "Well, only forty-six more days to the next boat." Arnold has it figured to the number of hours. Have a sneaking hunch that I wouldn't mind it at all if you were here....

Never saw so many moths as there are in this country. Have been killing them for an hour. You know how scared I am of them anyway. Everyone has had all their clothes eaten up but me. I have escaped so far....

One of the best things they do down here is to shake hands. You have to do it a hundred times a day. You meet a man, he shakes hands, he leaves— walks around the block—meets you again—and shakes hands....

---

*He did — on many occasions.

☆

Had quite a bit of sun today and got a lot of stuff cleaned up. If it continues we will make the May boat all O.K. Got another sweet wire from you this morning when Clyde got up.... The last month and the last ten days on the boat are going to be terrible. Have lost every bit of patience I ever had. Even the people working for me say that they get so scared when they get up to work for me that they can't do a thing because they are afraid I am going to bawl them out. You know that that is not very much like me. At least, don't ever remember having that trouble before....

There is one thing that you would go crazy about down here and that is the bathing. It is delightful. Don't do much of it but when I do I thoroughly enjoy it. If the folks back in L.A. had this water and beaches they would go nutty about it and the beaches would be crowded from San Diego to Frisco. It doesn't get as hot here as it does in L.A. but oh, how you feel it. Everyone is soaked to the skin every day of their life from perspiration. The crew all work with nothing on from the waist up and they are all as tan as the natives. This place is sure a degenerate's paradise. Some of our gang are wallowing in it. Can't understand how they can but they are....

☆

Shot the big feast and dance scenes today. The more I see of the natives, the more I appreciate what a big faker Flaherty was. He knew next to nothing about it....

☆

Got a lousy break in weather today—had to quit about 2:30. Got some pretty good dance stuff done though; at least I hope it is good. Had to use doubles for the two girls [Torres and Bush]. Both of them supposed to be dancers and they waddle around like a couple of young locomotives. Too much lead in the anckay.

Went to bed last night about eleven with just a nice little edge on. First in some time. Not too much, just enough. And slept through until six this morning, which is quite a record for me. Blue and Harry Albiez had a battle today. Both of them got temperamental as the devil. Don't blame them though....

Preparing to shoot the Feast sequence: Raquel Torres behind Van Dyke; Monte Blue in open shirt. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Raquel Torres (left) and Rena Bush rehearse "The Dance of Gifts," performed during the Feast sequence. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

☆

Another grey morning sky....Thank God I have an interior [scene] that I can do. Saw Clyde last night and he gave me your wire. Glad you liked the letter.... Also glad you quit the Cohn job [at Columbia]. Never did like the idea of your working there....

Am answering last night's wire today over the government line as I do not care to ask Clyde to send it. He is getting so damned important with that wireless thing that I would rather have the expense of a cable than ask him to send one. He has so many irons in the fire over that radio, talking and making schedules with so many different stations that don't mean a damn thing....

The whole company is suffering terribly with prickly heat rash. Woke up this morning wringing wet. It is still oozing from every pore and coffee doesn't help it any. As much as I want you here, am glad you did not come as you would have suffered terribly. Hereafter though, you are going where I go if you do suffer. More impatient for that boat to get here with mail this month than I was last month. More impatient about everything....

☆

4:30 and another day. It looked like rain yesterday so had all the lights moved inside, which is quite a job, and started shooting on one of the only two interiors I have left. And then the sun came out nicely and stayed out all day. Went into the surf with the gang for a few minutes at noon yesterday....

☆

It is 1:45 a.m. Got up one hour-and-a-half ago. Am doing better all the time. By the time I leave here, it won't be necessary for me to sleep at all. Got to bed about 9:30 though, so got nearly three hours sleep. That is Edison's time.

The gang here are going to quite a lot of bother and expense to give me a surprise party tomorrow and some of the natives and Frenchmen here can't get to me fast enough to tell me all about it. Hate the idea and dread the party but will have to go through with it.

Another thing that is getting on my nerves terribly is the distant thunder of the surf breaking way out on the reefs. It is a dull, distant, incessant roar. It isn't so bad when you first hear it, as it has rather a

menacing, shivery sound that gives you a creepy feeling, but the constant repetition is wearing. God, what an endless engagement.

Next to me, I guess poor old Pop Arnold is the unhappiest of the outfit. Clyde is making it rather tough for him too. If anything were to happen that would make us miss that May boat, he would die—and possibly fall right over my already dead body. You will cry when you see this poor bunch of exiles getting off the boat. We will likely cry when we get off....

Over a month-and-a-half yet! I wish Flaherty were in hell. If he hadn't four-flushed around, I would be back by now. If we ever see [Flaherty's] *Moana* [1926] running again anywhere I want to take you, just to show you how much of it is real and unreal. Almost all of it staged. Natives doing things that they never do or did. And he knew no more about a camera than he did natives. Think his wife and brother must be responsible for his other films. I know very damn little about natives, but will bet I know more than he does....

☆

Well, the worst has happened. The studio has ordered me to do the storm [at sea] sequence, that I intended doing at the studio, here. Of all the idiotic ideas. That caps the climax. And the worst of it is, I have got to make the effort to do it. Maybe I will catch the May first boat and maybe I won't....

☆

4:30 in the morning and I am perspiring like it was high noon.... Never want to be under the equator again unless it is with a thoroughly equipped troop — and you. You, principally. Do you realize how I have to drive myself to work, literally have to lash myself into every scene? Hate the sight of the camera. It is terrible. We are getting some pretty good stuff, but can imagine how much better it might be if I could get up a grain of enthusiasm. But that is impossible. That grey sky again....

Ten more days and mail. The gang will begin checking off days again now till that boat gets in. And when it does, if we are on location, everyone will be sneaking off the set and down to the road to catch the first sight of the machine that brings it out to us. They bring it in gobs and bunches as fast as it is sorted. Last boat, the machine made

three trips before I got a letter. Was nearly crazy. Everyone reading mail but me. You are always wondering if it is possible that they have lost yours. The whole gang acts like a bunch of kids that are expecting Santa Claus.

[March 22]

Yesterday was an eventful day. In the first place there was a change of the moon. The sun crossed the equator ushering in the equinox, and it was my birthday. At noon the natives presented me with a huge lei that reached to my knees or below. They had written a song for me, which I listened to about a dozen times. Then in the evening came the dinner. It was a much more pretentious affair than I had any idea it would be. They engaged a house on the beach; literally covered it with flowers. I got several huge bouquets during the day.

One funny gag they had at the dinner was a big pail full of dishes especially brought for me to throw, and then just outside the door, they unveiled a huge bull's-eye target. I was supposed to throw dishes until I hit the bull's-eye. The first time I missed and the second time I hit dead center. Well, the thing was wired and on a trigger and the second I hit the bull's-eye there followed a series of the damnedest explosions you ever heard and several fireworks were set off. Altogether it was a nice party and nice of the gang to throw it. I did not get drunk and came home about 10:30 and went to bed....

Another electrician, the generator man, was put to bed by the doctor today. Clyde left the set sick about 2:30....Wanted to come home very badly and go to bed myself, but there was no one to take my place.

Just got back from supper where I ate nothing. Tried to, but have just simply sickened on the food here; haven't had any for a day-and-a-half. Am honestly sick, kid. And although I poo-poo the idea, at the same time, back in my mind is a damned haunting thought that if I should get knocked off my feet, it might delay us another month....

Another gloomy day. Feel much better this morning. Had a good night's sleep. Went to bed about 9:30 and slept soundly through to 5:00....

Well, it is thirty-eight more days before we leave this island.... Everybody now is praying hard for the sun. Interiors are exhausted. Thank God we have the lights as it will help us to get by with murder....

☆

Am laying off of the liquor here in an astounding manner. Haven't been drunk in three or four weeks — quite a record.... All on account of a cockeyed promise made to you. It is ridiculous to make a promise to a woman, and I knew that when I made it. Haven't any idea what I am talking about — just rambling along....

☆

There are a million moths flying around the light and I am constantly dodging them between letters and words. You may remember how scared I am of them. Feel like David [Daniel] in the lion's den.

Yesterday and day before I had terrible attacks of cramps.... Rather an intestinal flu effect. They say the white man weathers the flu down here pretty well, but that it is nearly always fatal to the native....Under pleasanter circumstances, I could enjoy them very much. Childish, easily pleased and harmless. You would die to see the excitement a game of marbles causes. I don't mean among children, but grown men and women. As far as ability is concerned, they are a great deal more intelligent and clever than the majority of actors sent down here by the company.

The leading lady [Raquel Torres]...tries to act cute and looks like a Christie comedy girl in the picture. Don't know how she is going to get by at the studio, but hoping for the best. I could kill her a half-dozen times a day. She will look at me with a baby stare while I tell her something — I'll ask her if she understands — she will answer, "Yes," and then she will go on and not do a damn thing I have told her to do.

The other girl [Rena Bush] is as bad.:..The heavy man, [Robert] Anderson, has to be drilled.... Oh, what a merry time I am having. It is 3:00 a.m. Think I will lie down and see if I can grab a few moments more sleep....

If the present schedule continues we will make the May boat without a struggle....

☆

3:15 a.m. and I am perspiring like mad, outside and in. Am so damn mad this a.m. From the studio on down, have had to battle everyone, or else handle everyone with gloves and diplomatically, that I am worn out. Never had so many people around at any one time whose very personality grabbed on my nerves so. Never worked in such stench and dirt and ignorance. Never had to stall and waste time before to make people think I was getting over a great scene.

The women of the company are impossible. Bob Roberts' wife is the only one I'd give hell room to....Never needed an actress more. Blue is the only man giving me a performance that I don't have to sweat my guts out over. De Vinna has gone haywire over the radio. He is just beginning to wonder why I do not come up there anymore. Will let him wonder until I get through shooting and then will let him know all about it—plenty....

Will make one exception—["Pop"] Arnold. Many times, when I can hardly get out of the chair, Arnold will be around with a hand or a word that will drive me on. He has such utter and supreme confidence in everything that I do,... in spite of the fact that Clyde is driving him nutty. With all of this, have been sick for the last few days. Owing to that and loss of sleep, I am so tired all the time that it is an effort to get out of the chair....

☆

Got a sweet little wire from you this morning before going to work and it has calmed me down somewhat....You probably won't find me the same. I'll be grouchy—cross—and temperamental....

Just went into the room (am writing this on the porch) and took a drink of gin that took five good swallows to get down. Really felt that I needed it, but that is all I shall take tonight. Never felt like I had to have a drink before. Haven't had more than an edge on for — it must be nearly three weeks now....

Walked out on the rushes tonight for no other reason than that I didn't want to sit there any longer and look at them. And now when I think it over, there is a lot of stuff there that I should have looked at. Just didn't have the interest. It is 7:15 and think I will go to bed. Went to bed last night at 8:30 and managed to sleep until 3:15....

Give you my solemn word that I am positive, had it not been for my [Christian] Science, would have gone nutty or been prostrated here long ago.

Put Grant Whytock to work yesterday to shoot a couple of scenes for me which should have taken about 60 ft. of film. He shot 1,900 ft. on the two shots. Shot them from every conceivable angle. Guess he thought he was making a production. Well, all I can do is to keep plugging along for another month and five days....

[March 27]

Kid, I slipped up a little on my promise last night. Got pretty well edged—not drunk but going good. But will lay off for a week altogether by the way of penance. Also got your sweet wire, but do not understand why you sent news about Flaherty in code. Isn't that supposed to be known?

If [director King] Vidor is making the big ditch [canal] picture—don't you get an idea that you are going down to Panama with it*.... Hope you are not working the day we arrive....

Was knocked out of work today by rain. This month is nearly done. One more month! My God, how it will drag. You would have cried today if you could have heard the gang sitting around and promising themselves the first things they are going to eat when they get back. You tell [Dick] Porter [Van Dyke's houseman] that I never want to see another chicken or lettuce, cucumber, onion, and tomato salad. I want him to have a tub of butter and a barrel of milk on hand and several quarts of rich cream. Wonder if I am ever going to get one of the Italian dinners I have heard you speak of....

Wonder what you had your battle with [Harry] Cohn about? Was the work too heavy or did he get fresh? You don't have to work for any of them kid if you don't want to. I'm the only bird you have to work for....

Wish you would tell Porter to send me a little word once in a while as to how everything is. Guess my Mother has gone back to San Diego—but whether for good or not, don't know....

---

*Not produced.

This is the 27 of March, Tuesday. Saturday the boat arrives and then thirty more days....

☆

Came the dawn and I am sitting here wringing wet with perspiration and the moths whirling about my head like a swarm of bees. Millions of them. By and by they will go to sleep and then the ants and bees, wasps and hornets, centipedes and scorpions will wake up and begin to get busy on this "Isle of Dreams."...

☆

Put in terrible day trying to teach the leading lady how to act. She is impossible. May have to retake the whole thing. Will wait till I see the rushes....Can't understand what the studio saw in her. Even Blue got impatient and bawled her out. Then I had to bawl him out for doing it. But he took it and said nothing. Gee, the time is dragging. Two-and-a-half more days and mail. News from God's country and home! I made a mistake in my calculations and it is still thirty-three more days before the boat goes....

☆

Another day in back of me....

Got a pretty shot or two today. No one had to act much. I have only three more sequences to do which could be done cheaper and better at the studio but suppose we will have to stay in this terrible place for another month to do ten days' work. Am wiring the studio anyway. Will go crazy with joy and surprise if they should tell me to come by this boat. No such luck, I'm afraid, and my only satisfaction is that I will not be disappointed. Day after tomorrow—MAIL! Thirty-two more days and—HOME!

☆

Miracles of miracles. Kann sent a wire with mine backing me up [to have the company leave on the April boat]. Now we will see what the studio does. I am betting against their agreeing. Well, they can't do any worse than keep us here the thirty-two days we expected to stay anyway....

☆

12:20 a.m....

Am wondering what the studio says to the wire. Will be all excited and live on hope now until tonight—or should I say, tomorrow night. How we are all hoping and praying. And while none of us will be disappointed if they wire us to stay, at the same time there is going to be a lot of anathema hurled at the studio if they do.

Getting more disgusted with leading lady every day....With the exception of Monte, I feel like I'm heaving and tugging at a big log in the water—and water soaked at that. Think that Monte is giving a splendid performance. Wish we had gotten a native girl here now. She would at least have looked like a native. The kid doing the native boy is immense. Wish his part were larger.*

Today is Friday—tomorrow the merry old mail gets in. It is just like a big mouthful of home for a while. There is only one other thing that would keep me here now if the studio gave us permission to finish there, and that is three or four days of rain. I have about two days' work yet that must be done here. We are all on our knees worshipping the weather god. That is one thing that would about kill us....

☆

Sweetheart, I am drunk—three ways. Drunk with joy that we are leaving here [on the April boat], drunk with pleasure over your sweet wire, drunk with liquor celebrating two aforementioned drunks, so won't attempt to write....

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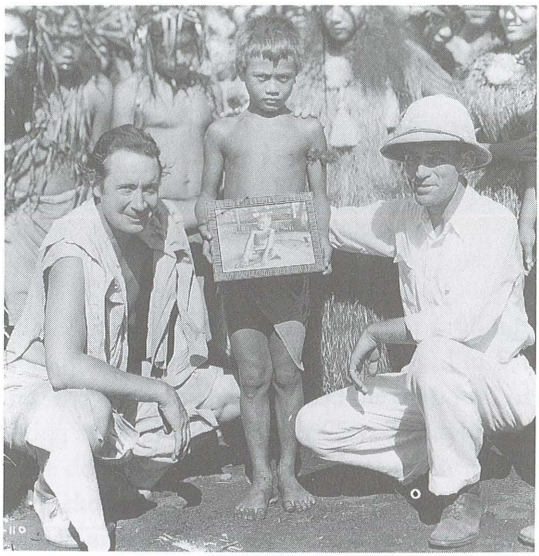
*A nonprofessional Tahitian child who played the role of "Fayaway's" (Raquel Torres) little brother.



Tahitian boy who played Fayaway's (Raquel Torres) little brother holds the first photograph ever taken of him. Monte Blue and Van Dyke on either side. (*Courtesy: Bison Archives*)

Edwina Booth (left), the leading lady in *Trader Horn* (1931), and script clerk Josephine Chippo on location at Murchison Falls in Africa. Van Dyke directed. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Editor's Postscript to *White Shadows* Journal

The R.M.S. *Makura* sailed from Papeete at 6:08 a.m., April 3, 1928. As soon as Van Dyke and company arrived in San Francisco (ten days later) they immediately boarded the train for Los Angeles to resume shooting at M-G-M in Culver City. The typhoon at sea and shipwreck were done first in the big tank at the studio. Then other material was picked-up. Meanwhile, on-location supervisor Grant Whytock, cameraman George Nogle, and unit manager Art Smith stayed in Tahiti filming additional atmospheric and undersea shots, returning one month later on the next ship.

M-G-M decided to make *White Shadows* their first sound film—sound, in this instance, meaning synchronized music and sound effects. There were water sounds, crowd voices, wind, moans, cries, laughs, whistling, and one spoken word: "Hello." The music, a compilation score, had some original material, including a theme song, "Flower of Love," composed by William Axt and David Mendoza. The compiled compositions by others include—among many cues—"By the Blue Hawaiian Waters," "From the Somoan Isles," "My Isle of Golden Dreams," "Sunset Land," and some Hawaiian chants played by a Hawaiian band (including what came to be known as the "Hawaiian War Chant" [by Prince Leleiohaku]—which goes back to the nineteenth century).

On June 2, *White Shadows* was previewed at the Westlake Theatre in Los Angeles to good audience response. The negative cost recorded in the in-house M-G-M "Operating Results By Picture" ledger was $365,000 (the original budget was approximately $150,000). The net profit realized (domestic and foreign) was eventually $450,000.

The critics and the public for the most part were impressed with the picture. Most of the reviews were positive—with virtually all of them commenting on the "remarkable"..."breathtaking"..."strikingly lovely" panchromatic photography. Clyde De Vinna received an Academy Award for his work. Even today the film holds up as an extremely well-made, imaginatively executed fusion of drama, travelogue, and romantic picturization of South Seas manners and customs.

And it is to Van Dyke's credit that he was able to extract uniformly believable performances from the mixed group of novice pros, Tahitian nonprofessionals, and seasoned players. The style and tone are reasonably consistent—even without considering all of the production difficulties.

Meanwhile, M-G-M was planning a film based to a degree on the best-selling 1927 book, *Trader Horn,* to be made in Africa with an entire company of players, production personnel, and technicians leaving from Culver City. Another pioneering enterprise. Van Dyke was the logical choice to direct. His preparations were interrupted when it was decided to do a quick follow-up to *White Shadows* with *The Pagan,* another South Seas location picture, to cash in on the cycle. But this time there was no question about the staff, crew, and equipment Van Dyke wanted to take. He decided the location shooting could be completed in one month—and it was. Ramon Novarro, Dorothy Janis, Donald Crisp, and Renée Adorée comprised the entire cast sent down to the South Seas on the ship leaving October 31, 1928, and the crew was almost the same as the *White Shadows* company, only on this occasion Harold Bucquet was added as assistant director and Josephine Chippo was script clerk (as she was on the upcoming *Trader Horn* junket to Africa). George Kann was the only surviving on-location executive from the *White Shadows* group (and he later went along to Africa as the business representative on *Trader Horn*). *The Pagan,* released in April 1929, was also a popular and profitable attraction.

Trader Horn kept the company in Africa for seven months, and after returning it was decided by Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg that the assembled location footage needed a great deal of "fixing," which included retakes on the M-G-M backlot, at nearby locations, and on the sound stages (this was Van Dyke's first "talkie"). Embellishments were even filmed in Mexico—doubling for Africa. The

resulting collage of real and faked footage finally was released in January 1931, and it was an outstanding critical and financial success, even though it cost $1,312,636 and was in actual production (off and on) a total of a year-and-a-half.

According to newspaper accounts at the time, the original plan was to have Van Dyke go to India from Africa for M-G-M's proposed version of *Gunga Din,* but that project was dropped after several writers at the studio contributed adaptations and treatments between 1928 and 1931.

A follow-up was needed to *Trader Horn,* and the resulting *Tarzan. the Ape Man* (1932), the first of six M-G-M Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan jungle vehicles (not shot in Africa), was almost as big a hit as *Trader Horn.* A relatively low ebb period for Van Dyke followed, including his last large-scale and long-in-production expeditionary feature, *Eskimo* (1933)—a major commercial failure. But the renaissance that began with such pictures as *The Thin Man* (1934) and *Naughty Marietta* (1935) culminated in 1936 with *After the Thin Man* and *San Francisco,* the latter being by far his most commercially profitable film, despite a huge production cost.

As noted earlier, Josephine Chippo had continued to work at M-G-M until May 21, 1930. About this time, Florence Thomas became Van Dyke's script clerk and concurrently his executive secretary at M-G-M. She remained in that capacity until his death in 1943.

In 1933, during the making of *The Prizefighter and the Lady,* Van Dyke was introduced to Ruth Mannix, the niece of Eddie Mannix, a high ranking M-G-M executive and later, studio manager. Van Dyke, after obtaining a divorce from his wife, Zina, in January 1935, on grounds of desertion (she left him in 1923), married Ruth Mannix in New Orleans in February 1935. They had three children: Barbara, Woodbridge III, and Winston.

Van Dyke (left) plays the role of a Canadian Police Inspector in *Eskimo* (1933) with actors Mala (Ray Wise), Joseph Sauers (later Sawyer), and Edgar Dearing. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Van Dyke and his future wife, Ruth Mannix, at the opening of *Eskimo* at the Four Star Theatre in Los Angeles (late 1933). (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Tarzan, the Ape Man Story Conference Notes

The 1931 contract between Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of Tarzan, and M-G-M specified that the author "grants right to Metro to write an 'original story' using character of 'Tarzan.'" Neither M-G-M nor Burroughs wanted any of his books or stories used; the studio was only interested in the concept and the name, desiring to modify everything to suggest an inversion of their film version of Trader Horn.

Novelist, poet, and screenwriter Cyril Hume, who was one of the writers on Trader Horn, *put together some ideas that had been discussed between himself, Van Dyke, and producer (supervisor) Bernard Hyman, who had worked in that capacity on some of the Tim McCoy pictures and* Trader Horn. *Then, with less than two weeks before shooting was scheduled to begin, British actor, playwright, screenwriter, composer Ivor Novello was brought in to work on the script — concentrating mostly on dialogue. Several crash program story conferences took place within a few days.*

Story Conference

"TARZAN OF THE APES"
[Tarzan. the Ape Man]
October 23, 1931
10:15 A.M. to 12:15 P.M.
Reporter: G. [Goldie] Appleby

MR. [BERNARD] HYMAN [producer]
MR. VAN DYKE
MR. [IVOR] NOVELLO [writer]

[Edited extracts from transcribed discussions in the M-G-M Script Collections]

Novello: ...The main object of the entire film is that this old fellow [C. Aubrey Smith] shall find the [legendary] burial ground of the elephants so he can retire and live an easy life and give his daughter [Maureen O' Sullivan] everything she wants. Now, first of all, who do we see? We see Porter* [Smith] and Holt [Neil Hamilton]....Have you got at the moment a definite plan of the opening scenes and what they are?

Hyman: Nothing outside of the script [by Cyril Hume] you read.

Novello: I like the surprise of the girl [O'Sullivan]. Naturally, if her steamer is coming up, they'll go to meet it—their astonishment when they see the girl.

Van Dyke: They'll go down if for nothing else than to get the papers and mail. And how they devour it. How we used to read the papers from America. They were all a month-and-a-half old but they were news.

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*Later changed to "Parker."

Clyde [De Vinna] used to get brief reports on the radio of what was happening.

Novello: Now, what situation can we have to exist between Holt and the girl?

Van Dyke: I see Holt going hook, line, and sinker.

Novello: What is her attitude to him? Why doesn't she fall for him?

Hyman: She does.

Van Dyke: Maybe he does arouse quite an interest.

Hyman: Of course, you can't have her fickle.....I think before we discuss the start, we should discuss the story—the relationships—the attitudes.

Van Dyke: We should have the flavor of *White Cargo* [play]....About that second sequence—we thought along these lines: We open on the night camp [on safari]. The girl is again hearing the night noises of Africa—hyenas—lions—jackals—and she loves it.The old man [Smith] wishes to God the damned things would shut up. Holt is probably getting a little kick out of explaining to the girl.

Hyman: A little romantic—he should be making a play for her.

Van Dyke: And she should know it, and says, "You're not at all different out here to men in England or anywhere else in the world." He says, "Do you blame me?" She practically tells him he's on the make for her. He says, "Of course I am—what do you expect of me—a beautiful woman out here—"

Story Conference

"TARZAN OF THE APES"
October 23, 1931
3:15 P.M. to 5:45 P.M.
Reporter: G. Appleby

MR. HYMAN
MR. VAN DYKE
MR. NOVELLO
MR. [CYRIL] HUME [writer]
MR. [JAMES] McKAY [second unit director]

Novello: I was reading that [Cyril Hume] scene again with Tarzan [Johnny Weissmuller] and Jane [Maureen O'Sullivan] at the river. I think it's charming. I think it has great underlying charm.

Hyman: I think we can improve on the dialogue. We never took a great deal of trouble with the dialogue.

Novello: It struck me as very charming.

Hyman: I think there's a chance—if the girl could look at him and tell him about himself in a whimsical sort of way. That's what I'd like to get into it. I think he could catch a few phrases and by her intonations he catches the whimsy in it too. Like...

Novello: I think I see what you mean...

Van Dyke: I'm so anxious to see that fine friendship between the father and the girl. I got so stuck on that in *Guilty Hands* [M-G-M, 1931]. Of course, Lionel Barrymore was responsible for that. I admit there was some swell dialogue in that.

Hyman: I defy Lionel Barrymore to make anything sound bad....

Story Conference

"TARZAN OF THE APES"
October 24, 1931
12:00 P.M. to 1:45 P.M.
Reporter: G. Appleby

MR. HYMAN
MR. VAN DYKE
MR. NOVELLO

Novello: ...It's coming on now, isn't it. We've got to page fifteen. That's the end of the first sequence....Do you like it?

Van Dyke: Yes, yes, I think it has a very nice feel. It would be nice if I'd give you some African words. They never speak about a trip—it's always "safari." And where they speak about tea, Jane could say, "I get that in London. Can't I get a sundowner?"

Novello: "The only thing I'm offered is tea—what about a sundowner [a drink with alcohol]?"

Van Dyke: She's just recalling it and she's pleased with herself that she's getting back into African colloquials.

Novello: I didn't want them to give in too easily. It increases the danger feeling for the audience if they say she couldn't possibly go [on safari].

Van Dyke: I like the reply that she says, and she's very serious about it—"discomfort...danger...insects...and heavenly excitement" —you get the change, you know. She says it so seriously and then she ends with "Oh, heavenly excitement!" Yes, I like that. I think it has a very nice feel—very nice feel and there's quite a bit of charm in the thing between the fellow ["Holt"] and the girl ["Jane"] that I like....When they speak about the country, it's "bush." And what does she say about the lion?

Novello: "The fierce, funny, faraway..."

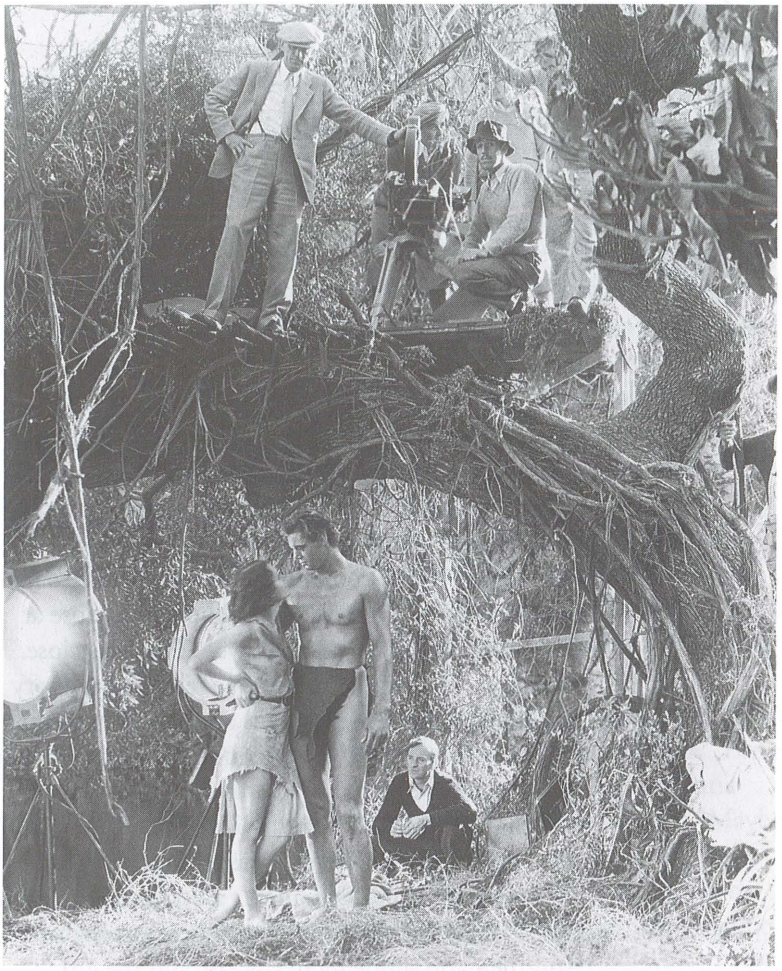
Van Dyke: It's a faraway, cadent roaring. The lion will go

(imitates lion).

Novello: I see. Rhythm, she could say.

Van Dyke: It is a marvelous thing but it's kind of terrifying. It's a roar, not a growl. I've actually had my lantern tremble on the table from the lions roaring. I wonder if there would be anything to it if she said, "Jambo, Bwana.....Jambo, Bwana," which is the native greeting, as though she were recalling it. Of course, the audience might not know what the hell she was talking about...I think it would be very nice to establish the sophistication of the girl, with all her sweetness. If Porter ["Jane's" father] took out a cigarette and she says, "Please," and takes the cigarette. She's charming and darling, but she's certainly sophisticated. I don't know, though, this is a kid picture.

Novello: I don't know—I think it's for everybody.



Filming *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1932) at Lake Sherwood, near Los Angeles. Above: Van Dyke and Clyde De Vinna. Below: Maureen O'Sullivan and Johnny Weissmuller. (*Author's collection*)

Story Conference

"TARZAN OF THE APES"
October 24, 1931
4:45 P.M. to 5:45 P.M.
Reporter: G. Appleby
MR. HYMAN
MR. VAN DYKE
MR. NOVELLO

Van Dyke: We open up on the night camp, and the night noises begin coming. The girl recognizes the bell-bird, and then the hyenas, and she says, "Oh, those sickening things." And then on top of that she says, "Isn't Africa grand?" As she speaks we might get a shot up through the majestic trees—we have such shots from *[Trader] Horn* [1931]. She says, "It's marvelous." Then comes the lion roar—and it's far. She poetizes on that. And then one roar is close at hand. She kinda shivers and says, "That was close." Holt says, "Too damn close." He tells Riano [Ivory Williams] to light the lanterns and tells him to put a man on the fire and keep it going. He says, "Night makes the big cats bold." He says, "They stopped building the Uganda-Tanganyika railroad once in this country—they [lions] were taking men out of the coaches."...Suddenly there's a boom-boom. Holt says, "Hello, there's a village near here somewhere." And then you suddenly hear a cry, and the girl says, "What animal was that?" Holt says, "That's not an animal." It's repeated and it's coming closer. The men get their rifles. Suddenly a poor native bursts in—bleeding—cut and nearly dead. They say, "What's the matter?" The native says he faced the Mutia Escarpment.

Novello: What he says in essence is that he broke a law of the tribe.

Van Dyke: That law is that no one can look upon the Mutia Escarpment. Holt says, "Mutia Escarpment? Where is

that?" The black starts to point, "There," and then drops. Suddenly they all stop and listen, and there's not a sound anywhere. Holt says, "Get him under cover, quick." The girl says, "What's the matter?" He says, "They're coming." She says, "I can't hear anything." Holt says, "But I can." You show Holt knows what he is doing. They cover the native up and then listen for a moment. Everybody remains still. The men get around the girl in a protective attitude—all quiet, defensive movements—and all of a sudden you hear s-s-s-sh—and the tribe bursts out and stops in front of the fire. Holt calls to the chief. They all talk in Swahili. The chief steps forward. They talk for a moment or two. The girl says, "What does he say?" It's practically what the native said.

Novello: "We are looking for a man who has broken a law."

Van Dyke: That's right. Holt says, "No man has passed here." The chief says, "All right," and goes back to the tribe and they melt into the night. It's just s-s-s-sh—and it fades, that's all.

The girl says, "They're ghostly." Holt says, "Those are the Ubangas—they're a courageous tribe." Porter says, "Well, maybe if they're afraid of the Mutia Escarpment there's some reason." Holt says "Maybe not. You know their superstition about elephants."

Then they get this native out and—or maybe they uncover him—maybe they have thrown something over him hastily. They uncover him—there's no move. Holt says, "Get up." No move—he leans down and the man is dead. They said he'd die....It might be a thrill.

Novello: I think it might

Van Dyke: It would be a nice gesture if they threw a tarp over this fellow and Holt sits on him. When the tribe comes in, Holt rises and tells the chief he hasn't seen anyone. The guy is dead, but he had pointed "over there." Do you like that?

Hyman: Very good—very good. I like that tremendously.

Van Dyke: "...I didn't know the guy was dead until I uncovered him." I think there's kind of a somber tone of Africa in it. That sequence is all right....

Rx for a Thin Man

By W. S. Van Dyke

[*Originally published in* Stage *magazine, January 1937*]

In Hollywood things are often done by cycles—gangster cycles, G-man cycles, historical romances, sea stuff, even Shakespeare. Somebody starts it and others fall in line to catch the shekels that bounce to the floor after the first jackpot.

Many pictures have been filmed requiring from one to two years to complete and costing in the neighborhood of one or two million dollars.

From the first scene, when Myrna Loy made a perfect three-point, one-take landing on a barroom floor, to the final shot of Miss Loy, Bill Powell, and Asta [the dog] in a train drawing-room, *The Thin Man* was filmed in just sixteen days [plus two days of added scenes and retakes]....It did start a new cycle in screen entertainment. It proved that murder mysteries on the screen necessarily did not have to be morbid nightmares; that, with sparkling wisecrackery and a chain of kaleidoscopic situations that keep an audience guessing to the last frame of the film, a murder mystery can be turned into pleasing, laughable entertainment and still retain every element of first-class baffling mystery.

The picture shattered Hollywood traditions in several other ways. It awakened the theatre public to the truth that romance actually can exist happily among more matured married persons. There had been so many stories, novels and screenplays of puppy love that audiences sickened of the overdose....Mature romances contain more understanding. In them the instabilities of youthful love affairs and quarrels have been overcome, all of the obstacles have been conquered and marriage progresses under full sail....

Also, the picture had other advantages. It already possessed the title and the story of the best-seller mystery novel in many years, which that admirable and sage critic, Alexander Woollcott, praised as "the best detective story yet written in America," and which was authored by Dashiell Hammett, the unquestioned master of detective-story fiction. It was adapted to the screen by the ablest scenarists, Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich, who faithfully transferred the humor and the mystery of the book to their script without losing one whiff of the original flavor. It was produced by Hunt Stromberg, who possesses a rare insight into mass psychology and the wants of the theatre patrons....Then, lastly, the picture had as its stars the ideal Mr. and Mrs. of the screen, Myrna Loy and Bill Powell—not to forget Asta.

The Thin Man already was marching across the theatre screens, kicking the dollars into the cash tills, when rumor arose that a sequel to the picture was to be made. In the Hollywood vernacular, the word "sequel" is a bugaboo that frightens most directors, and I am no exception, for if the sequel fails to approach its parent picture in public favor or financial returns, it is the director who is left holding the bag....

The return of Nick and Nora in a second mystery would not have such helpful allies as adaptation from a best-selling novel and universal ballyhoo through newspaper serialization. This time it must be an original story written solely for the screen, yet it must retain an interest equal to, if not greater than, that of the first story. Too, it must be as good, if not better, than the first....

Dashiell Hammett had his problems. In *The Thin Man,* Bill Powell and Miss Loy had brought the story to a happy ending in a drawing-room aboard a train that was speeding them back to San Francisco. And Asta, the frisky, wire-haired fox terrier, had his final close-up in Myrna's hat box.

Obviously, *After the Thin Man* could not be filmed without Powell and Myrna—and Asta. As they were last seen returning by train to San Francisco, the new murder mystery must have its locale in San Francisco. They had trained out of New York about the day after Christmas. Allowing for time to cross the continent, the new story must be picked up on New Year's Eve to permit Nick and Nora to continue their madcap marital adventures without leaving too wide a breach between the two chapters of their hectic honeymoon.

Here, at least, was to be something new in film fare—two distinctly separate motion picture mysteries, linked together with the same major characters and with less than a week's time elapsing between the finale of the first and the beginning of the other....

I have felt very fortunate in having the same personal staff on the pictures I have directed for many years....The same scenarists, Goodrich and Hackett, fell heirs to adapting the new original story....Bill and Myrna had grown three years older than the original Nick and Nora, and had alienated themselves from those characterizations by many successive screen roles of varied interpretation, so it was necessary for them also to step back three years into the amusing, delightful characters of Nick and Nora....

New actors had to be carefully selected to adapt themselves to the unusual new characters, as intriguing as *The Thin Man* characters if not more so, created in *After the Thin Man* to muddle the element of mystery, for in such detective fabrics as Hammett weaves, unusual characterization is one of the more important structures of fictional enigma.

Since *After the Thin Man* has San Francisco as its theatre, I chose to capture the true atmosphere of the city so the picture might breathe its true life. Although confronted by many handicaps, such as overenthusiastic crowds who interfered with the shooting, and low-hanging stubborn fogs, we did succeed in filming most of our exteriors up and down San Francisco's throbbing streets and around its historic landmarks, with the mighty Golden Gate and San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridges, symbols of the new and greater San Francisco, constantly in the background.*

Once the foundation for *After the Thin Man* was firmly laid, no major obstacle presented itself....The picture progressed with precision and with the finest cooperation from every person who had a hand in it.

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*Many exterior shots possibly were filmed in San Francisco, but only a few made it to the released version.

William Powell, Myrna Loy, and Van Dyke on location at Telegraph Hill (just below Coit Tower) in San Francisco for *After the Thin Man* (1936). The Embarcadero and the then new San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (along with characteristic fog) in the background. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

William Powell and Myrna Loy on either side of Van Dyke during the making of *After the Thin Man.* The inscription on the photograph being held, taken in Tahiti during the filming of *White Shadows,* reads: "To my dear old cell mate—Bill Powell—from a pal, W.S. Van Dyke." (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

The Star Creators of Hollywood

(Third in a series)

By Howard Sharpe

[Originally published in Photoplay *magazine, December 1936]*

...I found him [Van Dyke] for this interview on the set of *Love on the Run* [1936], a rollicking little thing done up especially for Joan Crawford and Clark Gable. Joan was in a hurry to get away for her vacation so they had called in Van Dyke, as they always do when anything has to be done well at terrific speed. They had been shooting only fourteen days, and this was one of the last scenes.

The most important impression you carry away from any company working under this man is laughter and high good humor, and it was roaring laughter I heard first when I pushed open the heavy sound stage door and went in. The scene was one of burlesque between Joan and Clark, who were both in costume. Joan lay weakly drying her eyes on a great canopied bed. Gable sat chuckling on a nearby chair. The entire staff was grinning, and Van Dyke was leaning against the prop wall bellowing.

"Tell me," I said to an assistant cameraman. "What's so darned funny?"

But he didn't know. None of them did....

We sat talking, after lunch, in his wood-panelled office....I pointed out,..."You're one of the best in Hollywood. And I want to know why. Maybe the studio does select your stories for you, maybe it does assign big stars to the roles, maybe you do have, from the very beginning, the component parts of a good motion picture. But the stories have to be developed and the stars directed and all the pieces put together correctly.... All of which is your job."

He leaned back in his leather chair—very tall and very tanned, with that impression of lean strength which always sits about him. "Well, first," he began, "the producer assigns a story—"

"After you've passed on it?" I interrupted.

"Nothing of the sort. I never have the slightest inkling of what my next picture will be until the studio calls me in and hands it over. Then I start work the next day."

"Even if you think it's lousy?"

"Even If I think that," he agreed gravely. "It's their funeral, not mine. I'll do the best I can with it and they can take either profits or losses—I'm satisfied with the salary they give me. Naturally, I hope the pictures I make will be popular ones, because too many flops, no matter whose fault they are, will hurt me and my reputation.

"I've only suggested one story in my entire career, and that with misgivings. But *The Thin Man,* to me, was such a natural I couldn't resist....I refuse even to read anything until it's ready for the Story Department," he said. "Then, of course, I sit in on the murder—and I'm no silent observer, either, as the writing boys will tell you."

They did, later. Woody Van Dyke, they admitted, is no easy guy to put anything over on. He comes into the [story] conference rooms....

"After you've got the story finished," I said to him, "I suppose you sit in with all the other departments. At least most directors do. They follow the set designers around and change backgrounds, and fuss with the wardrobe people about costumes—"

"I don't do any of that. My premise is that it takes more than one man to make a movie — each has his own job, and he's supposed to be an expert in it. Naturally he doesn't thank anybody who comes around trying to tell him how to work. I'm a director and that's enough of a task in itself...."

He crushed out his cigarette, lighted another. "The trouble with most movie people," he told me through the smoke, "is that they take the whole thing too seriously. It's no great matter of life and death about a picture. The public isn't going to stop buying theatre tickets if the length of an extra's dress isn't just right or a set has a little too much shadow in it...."

So when he has had his vehement say about the script, he goes quietly home to the Brentwood estate...until the supervisor [producer]

M-G-M studio portrait of Van Dyke (early 1930s). (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

phones to say that all at last is ready. Then at nine o'clock the next morning, neither early nor late by so much as a minute, he appears at the designated stage for work. The rest of his company, including the stars, are there and waiting if they know what is good for them.

And from that time on...he works like a dog, usually a little ahead of schedule, always impatient, incessantly amused and amusing.

Lunch is from twelve until one, which means exactly an hour and no longer, and at six each evening — on the stroke — he gestures to technicians and players, and reaches for his hat. His employers have his word that he will accept no summons to any conference whatsoever during his working day. It would delay the schedule and anyway, ultimatums Van, all that sort of thing should have been finished before the picture started.

An average production takes him about three weeks....

"So far as the actual shooting itself is concerned," he told me, "I have a few rules that I follow, yes. The main one is speed—keeping ahead of the audience. The reckless pace at which I work has a little more behind it than mere desire to get through and save money. The heightened tension and lack of dreary rehearsals necessarily has its effect not only on the staff but on the players as well.

"The atmosphere of the entire set is one of hurry, and the stars naturally snap into everything they do with an alertness you don't find on other stages. It gives a crisp, vital quality to the final production, and since they haven't worn themselves out going over and over a scene until they're stilted in it, the performance has spontaneity—which, anyway, is the most important thing in acting.

"After spending all those years at directing, I've finally learned that the first rehearsal—always the first take—is the best. There may be a few imperfections but the general effect is better; and that's the most important discovery I ever made."

Tempo, then, is the secret of his pictures' invariable success. Perfection of detail, word-for-word regard for the script sacrificed to speed and spontaneity—equals good pictures....

Cues must be picked up quickly by every member of the cast. "When you and I talk together," Van explained, "there's no hesitation between the end of my speech and the beginning of yours. You've begun to talk before the last syllable has left my lips, and I interrupt

your final word to start my next sentence. So I try to get that from the people I direct...."

He enjoys his work, does Woody. And he wants the others to enjoy it with him.

Second, he inculcates movement into every scene he takes. People, you will notice in a Van Dyke picture, do not stand about for minutes at a time and talk quietly. They go places, they handle things, they run and trot and fight and embrace and fall out of bed and climb telephone poles—anything but static inactivity. The cameraman is his own boss but he has one basic instruction: "Keep moving!"....

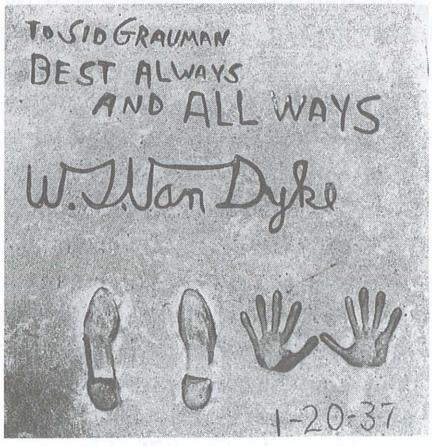
In the cutting [editing] Van keeps hands off again—but again an ironclad rule stands. The scenes are to be broken up as much as possible with big closeups. Shots that lag are to be sacrificed at all costs to tempo and pace, and dialogue is to race as merrily and naturally as possible.

"You see, three-fourths of any picture is utterly unimportant anyway," Van told me. "Out of the entire thing only a few scenes are so necessary to the effect or plot or characterization that you have to worry about them. The shots that I consider as merely builder-uppers can be finished as hurriedly as possible, and got out of the way; but love scenes must be slower and more carefully done. I pick out the best sequences of every story and spend most of my time working them up and elaborating them."

I remembered, months before, watching him do the scene in *Hide-Out* [1934] when Bob Montgomery and Maureen O'Sullivan, trapped suddenly in an abandoned house by rain, were to discover that they loved each other after all. As usual, everyone on the set was in high good humor, gags about the rain machine, which was working overtime, were being snapped back and forth—the mood of the entire company had that tense, whipped-up quality of enforced speed prevalent wherever and whenever Woody is on the job....

This is on the home lot; but during the location trips his tactics are different. He turns into a ruthless general, a disciplinarian to whom there can be no excuses for disobedience. "You can't be gentle with them when you're astraddle the equator or the North Pole," he told me, frowning. "I hate locations of course—nothing but grief and hard work. No communication, sanitation difficulties, transportation difficulties.... But there's one advantage. If people won't do what they're

Clark Gable and Van Dyke at the time they placed their hand and footprints in adjoining cement squares at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood on January 20, 1937. Sid Grauman is behind Van Dyke and cement artist Jean W. Klossner is at the far right. (*Courtesy: Endres/Cushman*)



Van Dyke's cement square at Grauman's Chinese Theatre (now Mann's Chinese). (*Courtesy: Endres/Cushman*)

told you can knock 'em out and put them on a stretcher and carry them away."

Shrewd, hard, uncompromising, he keeps consistent watch over his gang. "There's the morale to keep up," he told me; "after awhile they begin to hate themselves and me and everybody else. In the South Seas I have to go around and see that they take their quinine so the fever won't get them, and keep the men from taking the weather and the native women seriously—and make sure they don't cut themselves swimming over coral reefs"....

This Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke, then, is the man who in 1917 drew first fame by making five feature pictures for a total sum of $20,000, and four years later, after their box-office value was spent, his studio sold the negatives for $65,000.

Who, on his way one afternoon to begin a Western serial in the desert, opened his stateroom window for a moment and watched the only script in existence blow out and scatter over the sagebrush; and shot the picture anyway.

Who, after Africa and the Arctic Circle, remembers as the most harrowing experience of his life a walk across the yet uncompleted San Francisco bridge to make a shot.... ("Acrophobia or no acrophobia, my pride made me do it," he told me.) And who fears neither mad elephant nor irritated tiger but who will leave a room in absolute terror if he sees a moth....

"He's a speed demon and an economist," said Clark Gable to me. "But I'll trust my popularity and my sense of humor in Woody Van Dyke's hands any day of the year."

Van Dyke's Associates on Van Dyke

Up from Assistant Director

Lesley Selander

[*Originally published in* Action, *magazine of the Directors Guild of America, September-October 1971*]

During thirty-five years as a director, Lesley Selander has filmed more than 150 features and more than 150 television shows, and he has worked with scores of assistant directors. He himself was one of the most in-demand assistant directors before he became director....

Les Selander started in films in 1920 as a lab assistant. He broke out of the lab in 1921 with a job as assistant cameraman on *Doubling for Romeo,* a Goldwyn picture starring Will Rogers. Selander's next assignment was fateful. He acted as assistant cameraman on a Ruth Roland serial at Roach [*White Eagle,* 1922]. The director was the brilliant, erratic W. S. (Woody) Van Dyke, who was to have a profound influence on Selander's career....

One night he was cutting film at the lab when Woody Van Dyke telephoned.

"How about coming to work with me at Fox?" Van Dyke asked. "I'm starting a picture and I need an assistant."

When Selander mentioned that he had other work as a cameraman, Van Dyke replied: "Look—you've got to make up your mind whether you're going to be a cameraman or an assistant director. When you decide, let me know."

Selander took an hour and a half to ponder his career. Then he telephoned Van Dyke his acceptance....The experience at Fox, particularly under the tutelage of Woody Van Dyke, proved valuable....

Selander recalled a location in Sonora, California, when Van Dyke engaged the leading actors in drinking bouts until 4 a.m.

"The next morning's call was for seven," said Selander, "and Woody was in the hotel lobby at six-thirty when the bus was loading. The actors came staggering down from their rooms and started for the dining room.

" 'Where are you going?' Woody asked. He wouldn't let them have breakfast; they had to load onto the bus.

"That day he changed the shooting to do chases, and the actors were dying. When they complained, he told them: 'If you can't get up with me in the morning, don't go out with me at night....' "

When Woody Van Dyke moved to M-G-M, he took Selander along....

Van Dyke's methods were deceptive. Although he seemed to shoot fast and allowed producers to cut his films—in those pre-Guild years the director had no cutting rights—Van Dyke was always in total control.

"Once Woody was making a picture for Hunt Stromberg," Selander recalled. "He was doing a two-shot with the stars and now and then he put his hand in front of the lens. Later Stromberg said, 'Gee, that was a good scene—I wish I had it all in the two-shot. Now I have to use the closeups.'

"Woody told Stromberg, 'That's what I want you to do.' I learned from Woody never to shoot what you don't want in the picture."

Actors liked to work with Van Dyke because of his knack of evoking good performances with minimum effort. But he could be tough with performers, too. Once an actor gave a poor reading in a take, and Van Dyke ordered it printed.

"I don't want that in the picture," the star said.

"If you don't want it in, don't blow your lines," the director replied. "Next shot."

No star was sacred to Van Dyke, not even the great Garbo, nor Norma Shearer, the boss' wife.

"Woody had been an assistant director with D. W. Griffith, and he had learned that the director had to maintain control," said Selander. "Once he was called in to shoot two or three days' retakes of a Garbo picture [*The Painted Veil,* 1934]. He met her one day and started shooting the next.

"He talked to her for five minutes before the shot. Then they stood up, and he patted her on the ass. 'Come on, kid, let's get going,' he told her. She loved it.

"Once Woody was directing [Norma] Shearer after she had been married to Irving Thalberg. She was in the habit of driving to the studio with Thalberg, who came to work at eleven.

"Woody was always ready to shoot at nine, and when she didn't show up, he asked, 'Doesn't she know the call is for nine?' He was told about Shearer's late arrival. 'Call it a day,' Woody said.

"He went home and wouldn't answer his telephone. Finally the studio sent a messenger; and Woody sent back the word: 'Tell Miss Shearer to be on the set at nine.' She was, and she was never late again...."

Comments by Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich

Editor's Note: *The husband and wife team of Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich wrote several screenplays that were directed by Van Dyke:* Penthouse *(1933),* Hide-Out *(1934),* The Thin Man *(1934),* Naughty Marietta *(1935),* After the Thin Man *(1936),* Rose-Marie *(1936), and* Another Thin Man *(1939). Albert Hackett's quote was originally published in the book* Backstory, *edited by Pat McGilligan, 1986. Frances Goodrich's quote is from an article/interview by Ronald Bowers in* Films in Review *magazine, October 1977.*

Hackett: *Hide-Out,* with Robert Montgomery and Maureen O'Sullivan, [was] a real rush job. Van Dyke, who directed it, was a wonderful director....In this picture there was this Irish actor from New York, Whitford Kane, who M-G-M got to come out and play a part opposite Elizabeth Patterson. These were *stage* people. In one scene where Montgomery is wounded and in bed, Kane was told, "Now you start right here at that doorway. When she answers the door, you take the cup and saucer, come down around the bed, and carry it right off." That was the rehearsal so far as Van Dyke was concerned. Kane says to someone, "What happens now?" "They're going to shoot it." "Shoot it?!" They had to cut the sound out, he was shaking the cup and saucer so much. He got back to New York so fast. (*Laughs.*) Couldn't understand how anyone could stand it. No rehearsal or anything. Whitford Kane from the Abbey Theatre.... *The Thin Man* was supposed to be some sort of record, Van Dyke was so quick....

Goodrich: Dashiell Hammett had written those wonderful characters and their relationship, and we took it from there. Credit must also be given to director Woody Van Dyke, who said, "I don't care

anything about the story; just give me five scenes between those two people."

Comments by Myrna Loy

Myrna Loy's reminiscences about Van Dyke are excerpted from the book Myrna Loy: Being and Becoming, *by James Kotsilibas-Davis and Myrna Loy (1987).*

Loy: ...The big thing about *Penthouse* [1933] was that W. S. Van Dyke directed it. That turned out to be one of the most important things that ever happened to me. "This girl's going to be a big star!" he started yelling down in the commissary....

Woody, the fastest director I've ever worked with, still managed to give a personal stamp to everything he did. Spontaneity was his byword on and off the set. Full of practical jokes....

Woody sent a script based on Dashiell Hammett's best-selling novel *The Thin Man*.... I loved it and its prospect of a witty role for the first time since *Love Me Tonight* [1932].... Mayer considered me wrong for the part. "[William] Powell can play the detective—he's played Philo Vance already.... but I don't want Myrna in the picture." There was no precedent for casting me. Oh, they had a terrible battle! "She's all right." Woody insisted. "I've pushed her in my pool." Which he had—that was his test and apparently I'd passed. When Woody threatened to walk out, Mayer relented.

They called him "One-take Van Dyke".... Of course, he had us going like crazy, but by that time I could come in, look at new lines, and do them. You had to in those days, because they changed scripts overnight. Often you could study the day before, often you couldn't. Woody demanded extraordinary deeds and you needed the discipline to go along with it or you couldn't work with him. He ultimately became too fast; it became an obsession. But his pacing and sponta-

A party at Van Dyke's home in November 1936. Seated at the piano: James Stewart and Nelson Eddy. Standing: Van Dyke, Elissa Landi, Myrna Loy and her husband, producer Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

neity made *The Thin Man*....Filming went like a breeze, because we loved what we were doing....

Comments by Hal Rosson

Cinematographer Harold (Hal) Rosson's recall of Van Dyke is excerpted from Leonard Maltin's book, Behind the Camera *(1971). Rosson photographed the following films directed by Van Dyke:* The Cuban Love Song *(1931),* Tarzan, the Ape Man *(1932),* Penthouse *(1933),* The Devil Is a Sissy *(1936),* They Gave Him a Gun *(1937), and* I Take This Woman *(1940).*

Rosson: Woody Van Dyke was a very interesting person; I had the great pleasure of working on numerous pictures with him. He had a style that he exercised practically all the time. His thinking, as I recall it, was to emphasize certain things in a picture. In other words, the girl in his picture had to look beautiful. So Van would permit you as a cameraman as much time as needed, within reason, to get a good result of the girl. If I was going to make a photograph of a piece of newspaper that had to be lying on that table, he wanted me to photograph that newspaper in one second, or half a second if possible, but I could take hours with the girl. So I would say that all these stories you heard about Van Dyke as a one-take, hurry-up man—granted he wanted you to hurry up, *on that newspaper,* but he never hurried me up on the girl. "Let me know when you're ready."

For publicity purposes, Van Dyke takes Jackie Cooper, Mickey Rooney, and Freddie Bartholomew, the stars of his *The Devil Is a Sissy* (1936), to the film's opening night at the Four Star Theatre in Los Angeles (December 1936). (*Courtesy: AMPAS*)

Comments by Harold Kress

Harold F. Kress was the film editor on three Van Dyke pictures: It's a Wonderful World *(1939),* Bitter Sweet *(1940), and* Rage in Heaven *(1941). His comments on the director are excerpted from the book* First Cut *by Gabriella Oldham (1992).*

Kress: Van Dyke directed just like the Marines. He was in every morning at five o'clock. He laid out work he wanted to do that day. If he finished at three, wrap. If he finished at five, wrap. But he got that work done. He camera-cut, only shot up to a certain line in the script and cut. He knew he would go to a closeup, pick up the end of the scene, another two-shot, wrap, and that's it. So you could only cut it one way. And he never ran the film himself. We had to be on the set at eight in the morning to tell him whether the dailes were good or bad. Most of the times you'd tell him they're good. Once I had to tell him he made a mistake. I thought he'd stick a knife in me. They had rehinged the door of the set but nobody told Van Dyke, so the actor went through the door as it was one way and when he came in, it was different; you couldn't cut the shots together. They had to reshoot.

Comments by Hunt Stromberg

Hunt Stromberg produced sixteen of the pictures directed by Van Dyke at M-G-M—including White Shadows in the South Seas, The Thin Man *and its first three sequels,* Naughty Marietta *and four subsequent Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy musicals,* Marie Antoinette, *etc. The producer was known for the meticulous care and thoroughness that characterized all his productions. By the time he dictated the following "Points to Discuss with Mr. Van Dyke" (in the M-G-M Script Collection at USC) on June 29, 1938, during the filming of* Sweethearts, *they had worked together over a period of eleven years.*

Stromberg: ...Situations [in *Sweethearts*] not defined whatsoever.... Just old fashioned shooting....Important lines lost in unnatural speed....Discrepancies like this are occurring in practically every scene....Proving that there is no reading of the script [by you] nor understanding of the story. All coming under the head of gross carelessness and arrogance since these scenes are not being interpreted in any degree of consistency with the main story idea, nor even the characterization idea....If we continue like this there will be unreasonable amount of retakes....

After you finished *Personal Property* [1937], *They Gave Him a Gun* [1937] and *Rosalie* [1937—none produced by Stromberg], you were in receptive frame of mind and we talked things frankly at beginning of *[Marie] Antoinette* [1938] that one Sunday you came and saw stuff and displayed real cooperation. Now, since *Antoinette* is finished, going to your head again. Whole attitude one of directorial supremacy—you can do no wrong.... So far as I am concerned this can be the last picture, as seems that our past wonderful relationship cannot be continued on this basis....

Want to be completely frank, even to personal behavior, and so far as I am concerned, if your mind is on *Northwest Passage* (as maybe it is), might be just as well for you to go up there and shoot those shots....

Van Dyke was scheduled to direct Northwest Passage *for Stromberg, but because of other commitments and the necessity to shoot exteriors in Idaho during the summer, a second unit was sent to photograph material outlined by Van Dyke in discusssions and in a memo. Then the location filming was cut short due to various complications and the picture was postponed for one year, at which time another director, King Vidor, was assigned.*

Despite the tone of the above "Points to Discuss," Stromberg and Van Dyke did three more pictures together at M-G-M: Another Thin Man *(1939),* Shadow of the Thin Man *(1941), and* I Married an Angel *(1941). But clearly the golden days were over.*

Van Dyke chats with co-stars Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald during the filming of *Naughty Marietta* (1935), the first of several highly successful pictures the singing stars made together. (*Courtesy: Bison Archives*)

Comments by Ingrid Bergman

Ingrid Bergman worked with Van Dyke on her third American film, Rage in Heaven *(1941). She recounts the following in her book* Ingrid Bergman: My Story, *written in collaboration with Alan Burgess (1980).*

Bergman: I understood Mr. Van Dyke was considered very hard.... He really was very difficult and I didn't like him at all.... I couldn't work at all happily under such circumstances because it was just a question of "Get it in the can," "Let's get this picture off the ground," "Let's get moving...."

I've never walked out on a picture in my life...but I thought at least I can tell the director what I think of him. So next time he came into my dressing room, I said, "Why didn't you stay with the army, the way you go on marching and yelling? You don't know anything about people's feelings. You certainly can't direct a woman. You are certainly not interested in anything but 'Finish the picture,' no matter what sort of picture it is. You don't give us any possibility of acting; you don't give us any advice on that at all. Why don't you put on roller skates so you can go quicker from one place to another?"

He was very surprised, flabbergasted in fact....

He was quiet and he went away, and a little later he came back to my dressing room. "Am I really so hard, really so brusque with people, and so unpleasant?"

"Yes, you are. I've never worked with anybody that is so unpleasant."

"Oh! All right, I don't know how, but I will try and change. You know, you are very good in this part."

"I'm trying to do my best, but I'm very unhappy." So it ended on that note....

Editor's Epilogue

Certainly Woody Van Dyke was held in high regard by M-G-M executives and many of the people with whom he worked. Some of the biggest hits that the studio produced during the late 1920s and through the 1930s were directed by Van Dyke.

And it seems that he was always ready to help out. He was assigned *The Prizefighter and the Lady* after director Howard Hawks left (and before Hawks, Josef von Sternberg); then Robert Z. Leonard was relieved at his own request after one day's shooting on *Naughty Marietta* and Van Dyke stepped in as he did on *Rosalie* when Roy Del Ruth, because of extreme fatigue, asked to be released prior to the start of the picture. Van Dyke was called to take over from Rowland Brown during the filming of *The Devil Is a Sissy,* and he replaced Sidney Franklin before shooting started on *Marie Antoinette.* He was the third and final director, following Sternberg and Frank Borzage, on the trouble-plagued *I Take This Woman*—referred to in the industry as "I Retake This Woman." Shortly after filming began he replaced Robert Sinclair on *Rage in Heaven* and then later, Herbert Kline on *Journey for Margaret.* Also, he would fill in for a few days on various occasions for another director who might be ill or out on an emergency, as did others for him.

It has been said that Van Dyke whipped through a film only to have some other director go back and do added scenes, pickups, and retakes sometime later. This is not entirely accurate. The records show that more often than not Van Dyke would do this work himself — unless he was already on another film, or it was second unit, montage or special effects related. Besides, the philosophy on all films at M-G-M in those days was to regard the initial shooting as equivalent to a rough draft and, after the picture was edited, to go back and modify, retake,

add, etc., if it was considered necessary. This took place before and after the previews and was usually standard operating procedure regardless of whether the director was known to be slow or fast.

The recollections about Van Dyke's working methods in the previous section of this book reveal some possible insights as to what may have prompted Hunt Stromberg's "Points to Discuss" and Ingrid Bergman's less than joyous memories about working with the director on *Rage in Heaven.* Myrna Loy said that "Woody demanded extraordinary deeds and you needed the discipline to go along with it or you couldn't work with him. *He ultimately became too fast; it became an obsession."*

For the most part Van Dyke and Stromberg must have respected one another and functioned well together over the many years. Within the barrage of criticism in Stromberg's June 29, 1938, "Points" he does refer to "our past wonderful relationship." So what happened? Did Van Dyke's ego get out of hand following that extraordinary winning streak in the 30s? Did, indeed, his fast shooting become an obsession and was it ultimately taken to inordinate extremes? Was he disenchanted in part by having to do a multitude of follow-ups to his hits, such as *The Thin Man* series, the MacDonald-Eddy operettas, etc.? What about his health? Based on considerable evidence, Van Dyke certainly didn't take care of himself. He was a chain smoker, a consumer of endless cups of coffee during the day and of many glasses of gin during the evenings. In addition, those prolonged filming excursions to remote and difficult locations must have left him considerably drained. And, of course, there may have been other problems.

Van Dyke received the commission of Captain (later Major) in the Marine Corps Reserve in 1934. Early in 1940 he was chosen to activate the Reserves of the West Coast and lay the groundwork for a broad recruiting program. Van Dyke's 22nd Battalion received orders in November 1940 to report for active duty in San Diego. But eventually, tactical maneuvers and rugged training took their toll and he collapsed. The examining physician told him he was no longer qualified for active duty and Van Dyke was permanently placed on inactive status. Extremely disappointed, he tried several times to get reinstated, but it was no use.

All during the time he was involved in his Marine Corps activities, Van Dyke still was with M-G-M and directing movies. After two weeks on *Gentle Annie* (1944) he again collapsed. Van Dyke died at home on February 5, 1943. His death at age 53 was determined by an autopsy to have been due to "primary carcinoma [cancer] of the lung."

White Shadows in the South Seas

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture

Executive Producer	Irving Thalberg
Supervisor (Producer)	Hunt Stromberg
Director	W. S. Van Dyke
Scenario	Jack Cunningham
Adaptation	Ray Doyle
Titles	John Colton
Author of Book	Frederick O'Brien
Cinematographers (Tahiti and U.S.)	Clyde De Vinna
	George Nogle
	Bob Roberts
Supervisor (Tahiti)	Grant Whytock
Unit Production Manager (Tahiti)	Arthur Smith
M-G-M Executive Representative (Tahiti)	George Kann
Key Grip (Tahiti and U.S.)	Albert "Pop" Arnold
Property Man (Tahiti and U.S.)	Harry Albiez
Chief Gaffer (Tahiti and U.S.)	Lewis McAfee
Laboratory Technician (Tahiti)	Wilson Leahy
Interpreter (Tahiti)	William Bambridge
Script Clerk (Tahiti)	Mrs. Grant Whytock
Script Clerk (U.S.)	Josephine Chippo
Film Editor	Ben Smith
Music (compilation score with some original material) arranged by	William Axt
	David Mendoza
Music Presentation	Major Edward Bowes
Original Theme Song: "Flower of Love"	William Axt
	David Mendoza
Sound Supervisor	Douglas Shearer

Sound Facilities	Victor Recording Company, Camden, New Jersey
Sound-on-Disc (Western Electric)	Synchronized Music and Sound Effects

A Cosmopolitan Production
Running Time: 86 minutes
World Premiere: July 31, 1928, Astor Theatre, New York City
West Coast Premiere: August 3, 1928, Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Hollywood, California

Cast

Dr. Matthew Lloyd	Monte Blue
Fayaway	Raquel Torres
Sebastian	Robert Anderson
Young Island Woman	Rena Bush

and
Tahitian nonprofessionals

Resources

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Center for Motion Picture Study, Margaret Herrick Library (Beverly Hills):

Josephine Chippo Collection
Grover Jones Collection
M-G-M Photograph Collection
Turner/M-G-M Script Collection
Howard Strickling Papers (M-G-M Operating Results by Picture Ledger)
Joseph M. Newman Oral History
Production Files
Biography Files
Periodical Files

University of Southern California, Cinema-Television Library (Los Angeles):

Hearst Newspaper Collection
M-G-M Script Collection
Periodical Files

The Van Dyke Family:

Scrapbooks and 1927 "Date Book"

Additional Photographs

Bison Archives

The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive
Pomegranate Press, Ltd.
Stacey Behlmer and Robert Cushman

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Filmography

Van Dyke directed the following films

(Year of picture's release and production company):

1917	*The Land of Long Shadows* (and scenario)	Essanay
	The Range Boss (and scenario)	Essanay
	Open Places (and scenario)	Essanay
	Men of the Desert (and scenario)	Essanay
	Gift O' Gab	Essanay
	Sadie Goes to Heaven	Essanay
1918	*The Lady of the Dugout* (and scenario)	Al Jennings Productions
1920	*The Hawk's Trail* (serial)	Burston Films
	Daredevil Jack (serial)	Pathé
1921	*Double Adventure* (serial)	Pathé
	The Avenging Arrow (serial) (co-director: William J. Bowman)	Pathé
1922	*White Eagle* (serial) (co-director: Fred Jackman)	Pathé

	The Milky Way	Western Pictures Exploitation Co.
	According to Hoyle	David Butler Productions
	Forget-Me-Not	Louis Burston Productions
	The Boss of Camp Four	Fox
1923	*The Little Girl Next Door* (aka: *You Are in Danger*)	Blair Coan Productions
	The Destroying Angel	Arthur F. Beck
	Ruth of the Range (serial) (Van Dyke directed several sequences, uncredited)	Pathé
	The Miracle Makers	Leah Baird Productions
1924	*Half-a-Dollar Bill*	Graf Productions
	Loving Lies	Associated Authors
	The Battling Fool	Perfection Pictures
	The Beautiful Sinner	Perfection Pictures
	Winner Take All	Fox
	Gold Heels	Fox
1925	*Barriers Burned Away*	Encore Pictures
	The Trail Rider	Fox
	Hearts and Spurs	Fox
	Ranger of the Big Pines	Vitagraph
	The Timber Wolf	Fox
	The Desert's Price	Fox
1926	*The Gentle Cyclone*	Fox
	War Paint	M-G-M
1927	*Winners of the Wilderness*	M-G-M
	Eyes of the Totem	H. C. Weaver Productions
	The Heart of the Yukon (and story)	H. C. Weaver Productions

	California	M-G-M
	Foreign Devils	M-G-M
	Spoilers of the West	M-G-M
1928	*Under the Black Eagle*	M-G-M
	Wyoming	M-G-M
	White Shadows in the South Seas	M-G-M
1929	*The Pagan*	M-G-M
1931	*Trader Horn*	M-G-M
	Never the Twain Shall Meet	M-G-M
	Guilty Hands	M-G-M
	The Cuban Love Song	M-G-M
1932	*Tarzan, the Ape Man*	M-G-M
	Night Court	M-G-M
1933	*Penthouse*	M-G-M
	The Prizefighter and the Lady	M-G-M
	Eskimo	M-G-M
	(Van Dyke also played the role of an inspector for the Canadian Police)	
1934	*Laughing Boy*	M-G-M
	Manhattan Melodrama	M-G-M
	The Thin Man	M-G-M
	Hide-Out	M-G-M
	Forsaking All Others	M-G-M
1935	*Naughty Marietta*	M-G-M
	I Live My Life	M-G-M
1936	*Rose-Marie*	M-G-M
	San Francisco	M-G-M
	His Brother's Wife	M-G-M
	The Devil Is a Sissy	M-G-M
	Love on the Run	M-G-M
	After the Thin Man	M-G-M

1937	*Personal Property*	M-G-M
	They Gave Him a Gun	M-G-M
	Rosalie	M-G-M
1938	*Marie Antoinette*	M-G-M
	Sweethearts	M-G-M
1939	*Stand Up and Fight*	M-G-M
	It's a Wonderful World	M-G-M
	Andy Hardy Gets Spring Fever	M-G-M
	Another Thin Man	M-G-M
1940	*I Take This Woman*	M-G-M
	I Love You Again	M-G-M
	Bitter Sweet	M-G-M
1941	*Rage in Heaven*	M-G-M
	The Feminine Touch	M-G-M
	Shadow of the Thin Man	M-G-M
	Dr. Kildare's Victory	M-G-M
1942	*I Married An Angel*	M-G-M
	Cairo	M-G-M
	Journey for Margaret	M-G-M

Van Dyke was Assistant Director on the following films:

1916	*Intolerance* (one of several assistants)	Wark Producing Corp.
	The Lash	Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co.
	Unprotected	Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co.
	Oliver Twist (Van Dyke also played Charles Dickens in the film)	Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co.

1917	*Lost and Won*	Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co.
	On Trial	Essanay

Van Dyke supplied the story only for:

1916	*Sins of Her Parent*	Fox
1919	*The Forbidden Room*	Fox

Editor's Note: Some other filmographies have included additional titles in all categories for Van Dyke, but I have been unable to verify these titles.

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About the Author

Writer-producer-director Rudy Behlmer has been involved with film and television for over forty years. He is the author of *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck, Inside Warner Bros., Behind-the-Scenes, Memo from David O. Selznick,* and five other books, as well as numerous magazine articles and liner notes/booklets to accompany film music recordings.

Behlmer has also contributed in various ways to a wide variety of documentaries, videos, and laser discs about Hollywood's Golden Age. For many years he was a vice president at Leo Burnett Company, Inc., one of the world's largest advertising agencies. He has taught on college campuses and lectured at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Directors Guild of America, of which he is a longstanding member.

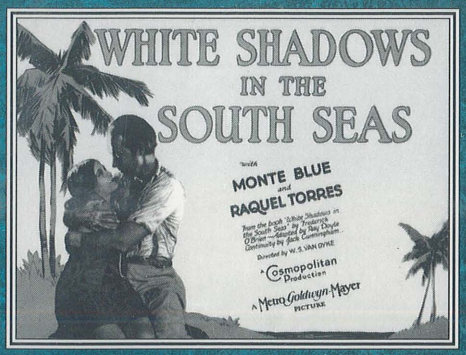
The uniqueness of both items immediately suggested to historian Rudy Behlmer the possibility of a book that would bring the two together, along with the other Van Dyke-generated writings and story conference notes: an assemblage of important primary source material from Hollywood's Golden Age—most of which has not been available previously—and illustrated with rare behind-the-scenes photographs from the archives covering all phases of Van Dyke's career.

About the Editor

Writer-producer-director **Rudy Behlmer** has been involved with film and television for over forty years. He is the author of **Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck, Inside Warner Bros., Memo from David O. Selznick, Behind-the-Scenes,** and five other books as well as countless magazine articles. He has also contributed to a wide variety of documentaries and videos about Hollywood's Golden Age. Behlmer has taught on college campuses and lectured at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Directors Guild of America, of which he is a longstanding member.

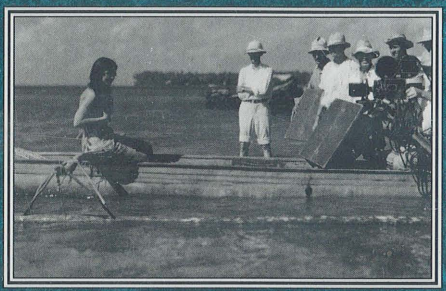
Photos on back cover (clockwise):
White Shadows in the South Seas Lobby Card courtesy of the Michael Hawks Collection
White Shadows in the South Seas (1928)
Tarzan, the Ape Man (1932)
After the Thin Man publicity photo (1936)

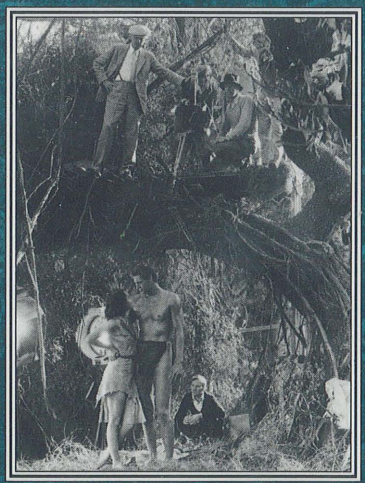
Jacket Design by Sue Slutzky
Printed in the U.S.A.



"Conditions here growing more acutely formidable. I am becoming terrified and feel that it is only just to suggest the best interests of the company might possibly be served by another director more thoroughly reliable than myself and one in whom the company could have greater confidence. Would suggest one of the apostles, as miracles are needed here."
— Journal, 1928

"The reckless pace at which I work has a little more behind it than mere desire to get through and save money. The atmosphere of the entire set is one of hurry, and the stars and crew naturally snap into everything they do with an alertness you don't find on other stages. It gives a crisp, vital quality to the final production, and since they haven't worn themselves out going over and over a scene until they're stilted in it, the performance has spontaneity – which, anyway, is the most important thing in acting. After spending all those years at directing, I've finally learned that the first take – is the best."
— 1936





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